G. 159.

W. T. R. Powell.

ONE FOOT ON SHORE.

A Novel.

BY THE AUTHOR

OF

"FLIRTS AND FLIRTS; OR, A SEASON AT RYDE."

"Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,
Men were deceivers ever;
One foot in sea, and one on shore;
To one thing constant never;
Then sigh not so,
But let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny;
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into, Hey nonny, nonny."

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
1869.

[*All rights reserved.*]

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/onefootonshoreno00litt

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

BOOK I.

FIRST LOVE.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	"AND 'TWAS THERE THAT ANNIE LAURIE GAVE ME HER PROMISE TRUE" .	3
II.	"KNOWLEDGE COMES, BUT WISDOM LINGERS"	38
III.	"ALAS! I HAVE NOR HOPE NOR HEALTH"	74

BOOK II.

THE TIME OF TRIAL.

I.	"THE MORTAL COLDNESS OF THE SOUL, LIKE DEATH ITSELF, COMES DOWN" .	105
II.	"I DAUR NA THINK ON JAMIE, FOR THAT WAD BE A SIN"	131
III.	"WHY WILT THOU EVER THUS BEFORE ME STAND, THOU GHOSTLY PAST?" . .	180
IV.	"HER HEART IT IS ANOTHER'S; SHE NEVER CAN BE MINE"	202

CHAPTER PAGE

V. "IN THE HOUR OF MY DISTRESS" . . 229

VI. "A WILFU' GIRL MAUN HAE HER WAY" 255

VII. "LOVE WAS GIVEN THAT SELF MIGHT BE ANNULLED" 284

VIII. "I WILL LOVE HIM MORE, MORE THAN ERE WIFE LOVED BEFORE" 305

ONE FOOT ON SHORE.

BOOK I.

FIRST LOVE.

" Our days are broken into parts,
And every fragment has a tale
Of the abandonment of hearts,
May make our freshest hopes turn pale;
Even in the plighting of our troth,
Even in the passion of our oath,
A cold hard voice may seem to mutter,
'We know not what it is we utter.' "

MONCKTON MILNES.

CHAPTER I.

"AND 'TWAS THERE THAT ANNIE LAURIE GAVE ME HER PROMISE TRUE."

"AND so you must leave the navy! I am *very* sorry."

"Oh, I don't care about that. It is but a beggarly profession after all, doing housemaid's work at housemaid's wages. I am only sorry to have wasted some of the best years of my life in it."

"But you were getting on so well—you told me you were getting on so well at the College. You were certain to pass high, and—and then you would have been a distinguished man some day. Oh! I know

you would, and we should all have been so proud of you."

"And now I am going away to make my fortune, and then after that I shall come back, and you will be just as proud of me, as if I were a distinguished man, won't you, Florence? Oh, it is only the going away from you that I care about!" the young man went on, as he met Florence's tearful eyes raised towards him for a moment with that look of love, beautiful when seen anywhere, but specially beautiful on a fair young face, such as that upon which Percy Gordon was now gazing. "And you know I might have been ordered off to the other end of the world any day, even if I had been stopping on in the navy—at least as soon as my examination was over," he added with a sigh. "It is a disappointment to me not to pass that, I own."

"Oh, yes! You have worked so hard for it too."

"Well—well," said Percy with rather an

evasive manner; "it is not my doing, and I don't see why you should blame me."

"I did not mean to, indeed I did not mean to," and Florence's head drooped still lower. She had not meant to blame him in words; all her life long she never meant to blame him in words, but his story had startled her somewhat, she had not been prepared for it, and gladly though she would have done so, she could not think it praiseworthy, nor even look upon him as injured, at least not as yet. With two hundred a year, and his pay, and no earthly prospects besides, he had contrived to run himself so hopelessly and inextricably into debt, that his uncle and former guardian, Lord Bulmer, had now advised his leaving the Navy at once, and sailing by the very next opportunity for Australia, where he might join some cousins, who, having gone out a few years before under the most favourable auspices, were already more or less comfortably established

there, and would be able to hold out a helping hand to Percy Gordon, who was to start almost destitute of capital, and with a pretty considerable load of debts still hanging about him, Lord Bulmer only undertaking to pay off a few of the most pressing for him.

This was the story that Percy Gordon had run down to St. James's Cray to communicate to his cousin, Florence Berkeley. He had been to St. James's Cray very often whilst studying at the Naval College at Portsmouth, for Colonel Berkeley was brother-in-law to Lord Bulmer, and though not generally a hospitable man had been so far won over by his nephew's good looks and pleasant manners, when he first came across him, as to adopt him as his own nephew after a fashion, and to give the young man *carte blanche* to make himself at home at St. James's Cray, whenever he could get leave from the college. So Saturdays and Sundays, days, which as every one acquainted

with the Naval College knows, hang very heavily there, were for the most part spent by Percy Gordon at St. James's Cray, and while there he beguiled the time, as such a young man was likely to do, by love-making with his little cousin, Florence Berkeley. Not that there was much need of making, it all came about very naturally and quickly.

Florence was too young to have as yet known many young men, and at the first glance she decided that she had never seen anyone half so beautiful as Percy Gordon. After the first long talk with him she was quite equally convinced, that she had never known anyone half so clever, and this long talk came very soon after the first sight of him, for Colonel Berkeley had no idea of putting himself out to entertain his young guest, though he did happen rather to like the lad, and Mrs. Berkeley never talked to anyone, and as to Miss Berkeley, who generally did the agreeable for the household, Percy had the good taste, as the

younger sister thought it, to prefer Florence to her, and at once to show this preference pretty decidedly, and perhaps this did more than all the rest to win Florence's heart; for though she was too much accustomed to be set aside for that eldest sister even to feel that she was so any longer, yet, though she would willingly have done so, she could not altogether herself admire that sister's ways of going on.

Miss Berkeley, better known as Fanny, was much handsomer than her younger sister, and eight years older; both advantages at the time of which we are speaking, when Florence was only sixteen, not having as yet fined down from too robust girlhood, nor been brought out, and thus polished by contact with the brilliant world of fashion. Notwithstanding Percy at once preferred her to Fanny with her fine features, well-developed figure, and abundance of fair hair, always displayed to advantage, as well as in accordance with the last new

discoveries in the art of hair-dressing. And Fanny after the first surprise at the novelty of the thing took it very amiably, and left Florence and Percy to amuse themselves, without expending any of her fascinations to lure Percy to herself, and, if by some chance she ever found herself alone with him, generally choosing for the subject of her discourse "that dear sweet child, Florence." In these conversations, which were however very few and far between, Florence being generally forthcoming when Percy was anywhere in the neighbourhood of St. James's Cray, Percy never waxed at all enthusiastic in the younger sister's praises, seeming indeed almost chilled by the fair Fanny's warmth, but all the same, each time he saw her, he became more and more convinced that his cousin Florence was the sweetest, fondest, simplest darling that ever breathed. Each time he saw her, that was, in between whiles, he contrived to forget it sometimes, but only to be again

more firmly convinced of it the next time of seeing her, and now he was very sorry indeed to think he was about to leave her, and for such a long time too. For, sanguine though he seemed, Percy knew that a fortune must take a little time in being made out of nothing, or worse than nothing, even in Australia.

Leaving Florence was not however the only thing that he was sorry about; for to a young man who was fond of grand dinners, and fine clothes, fond also of fine people, and all the innumerable luxuries that such a fondness renders almost necessaries; to such a young man the idea of going to Australia, to work perhaps for his daily bread, was anything but a cheering one. But just at this moment, when he was walking by her side, he was so much the most sorry at the thought of leaving Florence, that all his other causes of regret seemed to him nothing, and so now seeing her head droop, he felt that his last words

had not been kind ones; perhaps too, for a moment, that after all it was his own doing, and that if—if—if everything had been different, why then he need not have been forced to go away from her now. So he drew her arm lovingly within his own, saying fondly: "You will not think any harm of me, when I am gone, will you, Florence? You know we shall both have to think so often of each other, whilst I am far away."

Then Florence looked up and smiled, and Percy went on emboldened:—

"How I shall long to come home! and you must not fancy I am never coming back, if I take some time about it. You will wait for me, will you not, darling?"

Florence smiled again, but this time she did not look up, and her smile was rather a curious one, not a happy one certainly, indeed a very melancholy smile.

"Dear Percy," she said after a few moments' pause, "you will work hard, won't you?"

"I don't suppose I shall have any choice," he replied half peevishly. "I shall have to work for what I eat, I suppose."

"Oh, not so bad as that! is it really? oh Percy, you don't want any money now, do you? I know I have not got much, but—" And Florence clasped her hands upon his arm, and looked up beseechingly into his face.

They were a very pretty picture to look upon, as they stood thus under the full-flowering lilacs and laburnums, for it was the merry month of May when this sorrowful parting took place. Few young men indeed have more beautiful faces than that of Percy Gordon; his was not the style to go down with those who only admire that type of manly beauty, which footmen find so lucrative, namely the beauty that stands six foot high in its stockings, for Percy had never attained beyond the middle height; but his figure was good, and his face, at the time of which we speak, was simply perfect.

Regular delicately chiselled features, eyes of the blue of the Neapolitan violet with long dark shadowing lashes, glossy brown hair, a complexion that was just sufficiently browned for none to be able to call it effeminate, but clear and smooth as any woman's, and reddened by a delicate peachy glow, such as is very rare to see even among women; a rich red underlip, with an impulsive quiver in it telling how highly-wrought his nature was, and a forehead that spoke well for his intellectual powers, besides being very lovely also in its fairness; all these charms were Percy Gordon's, and yet he had a beauty far beyond all these. His was pre-eminently a speaking face, lights and shades played over it a hundred in a minute, and the beauty of his eyes, like that of most eyes worth speaking about at all, had to be felt in order to be known.

It was with a very beautiful expression that Percy now smiled upon his little cousin's imploring upturned face, a pretty

face enough, too—also with blue eyes and dark lashes, but the blue far deeper than that of Percy's, and the lashes not so long or dark, but with a sort of dewy freshness about them, reminding one much of violets, and at the first glance prepossessing in the owner's favour. The eyes were the chief beauty in Florence's face; her complexion was only that of a healthy English girl, her chin too large and heavy, her nose too small for beauty, and her hair, though luxuriant enough, of the most common-place brown, but her expression saved her; that and her eyes together had made Percy think her a very pretty girl the first time he saw her, and he could not help pausing for a moment to think so now again, before he said:—

"No, darling, I don't want any money now. I have got enough to take me out, and—and for myself, you know; it is only my debts that I have got nothing for. Oh Florence, dear Florence, you are worth all

the rest of the world put together. Pray for me, pray for me, won't you, my darling? for now without you I shall go wrong altogether—oh, I know I shall, and it is all hopeless."

Then she reasoned with him in her childish way, and they talked on and on, till the dinner-bell rang, and they went in; Florence to be scolded for not having dressed, and Percy to be talked at all dinner time by Colonel Berkeley, who, as he had been an extravagant man in his own younger days, and had only got out of his scrapes through having, fortunately for him, a kind generous old father, tried to make up for his own youthful follies by an extreme severity towards those of the rising generation.

"So you are to be sent out to Australia, to go to the dogs quietly, without making so much noise about it as you would in England, eh Percy?" said he grimly.

"I am going to Australia to make my

fortune, I hope, uncle," replied Percy in anything but a hopeful tone of voice, and gulping down a glass of wine as he spoke, as if to give himself courage for what was coming.

"Your fortune! your fiddle-stick! you've gambled away already all the fortune you're ever likely to have; you're not likely to make another now, my fine gentleman. No! 'Waste not, want not,' is the proverb I hold by, and at the rate at which you've wasted, you're likely to want for a precious deal before you've done with it. Oh, you talk very grandly now, but you will sing with the other side of your mouth, before you have been out in Australia a twelve-month. I know the state in which poor devils come home from there, and glad they are if they can get home too! With their constitutions shattered by all the privations they have gone through, and not a penny in their pockets to bless themselves with. And you look mighty like roughing it in

the bush, that you do!" and Colonel Berkeley laughed aloud, and looked round the table just to show how in his own opinion he had the laugh all on his side. Thus glancing, his eye lit upon Florence, down whose flushed cheek one large hot tear was fast following the other. "What! crying, baby? now what in the Heaven's name does it signify to you whether your cousin Percy starves out in Australia, or here at home, as starve he'll have to do, wherever he goes, for a spendthrift fool as he is? But come now, none of your snivelling here. Stop that row, or just go out of the room, if you please. You can't eat any dinner whilst you are crying in that way, so don't say I am unkind, and won't give you any; you may come back, when you can behave like a young lady."

And Florence sobbing convulsively hurried from the room, while Percy, with scarlet cheeks, sprang up to open the door for

her, and then finding himself too late, sat down again, exclaiming—

"But I do say you are unkind, uncle, and you always are unkind to Florence. Because she is so young and gentle, you think you can do what you like with her, and you would never speak in this way to Fanny, who is more up to things, and would give you as good as she got. You know that as well as I do, and I call it disgraceful and awfully shabby of you, and so I won't stand being lectured by you any longer. I'm not the first fellow by a long way that has run through his money, and I shan't be the last either, and if I do starve in Australia, I hope it may give you a great deal of pleasure, but I shall take precious good care not to please you in that way, if I can help it, and I expect you'll see me back again long before you look for me, and with a fortune too."

"You'll have to be a long time coming, if you wait till I look for you," said the

domestic tyrant grimly. He had been put down now, and was not likely to make himself quite so disagreeable again for a little while, but at his best he was grim, and those around him had to put up with it.

At last dinner was over. To Percy it had seemed to last for ages, that last dinner he was ever to join in at St. James's Cray, where before now he had shared in so many pleasant meals, and he hurried away to the schoolroom, where, as he had expected, he found Florence sitting in the twilight, her elbows resting on the window-sill, her chin supported by her hands, and her eyes gazing fixedly out into the evening. Then Percy sat down beside her, and, as he had often done before, he told her how he loved her, and how she could not possibly know what she was to him, so much more than he could ever hope to be to her—he was simply all the world to her—and how for her sake he would be steady

and work hard, and how he would write long letters to her. She must not mind if they were stupid, for he was not good at letter writing, but to her he would write a little bit every day, and then he should be sure to leave out nothing; and she must write long letters to him also. Then Florence looked quite bright and brave, and said she would, and that indeed she knew the time would pass quite quickly.

"Oh, it will seem like nothing to look back upon," she said merrily, and then Percy grew almost angry, and said he believed she did not mind parting from him. Of course it was very nice for her in her comfortable home, she would soon meet with other friends, and forget him.

"But I shall never care for any one as I care for you, Percy," said she, quite simply, yet earnestly, with the dewy blue eyes fixed on his.

"That is what girls say," replied Percy,

"but oh! I know it can never be the same again."

"I was reading a quaint old poem the other day," said Florence, very seriously, "it said how, when two people really loved each other, they were like a pair of compasses, which, however far apart the two points may go, always remain united in reality, as lovers do by their strong love for one another. As long as that is the case it does not much matter how far the points are separated."

"Yes, it does though. That is all very well for people to say, when they are not going to be separated, but when they are, it does matter, and there is no use in saying it does not."

Then Florence was silent, and after a while Fanny came quickly through the garden to the schoolroom window, and warned the two young things that tea was already in the drawing-room, and thus saved them from another scolding.

She had never done this before, but they were both too much pre-occupied to take notice of this, or to thank her, and the rest of the evening passed very gloomily. As they were separating for the night, Mrs. Berkeley asked her nephew, (she and Colonel Berkeley always called him nephew, though he was no relation in reality) what train he had to leave them by next morning.

"By the 7.30," said he, with a shudder.

"Good-night then, and good-bye, my dear boy," said gentle Mrs. Berkeley. "I shall not be able to see you to-morrow, as you start so early, but I'll tell Stevens to take care that you have a comfortable breakfast at half-past six; that will give you just about time enough to get to the station. And you know, dear Percy, that you will always have all our best wishes and prayers that you may do well in Australia. Though very, very sorry for your

imprudence, that does not make us forget how fond we have always been of you, and we shall always be glad to hear of you, if ever you can find time for a letter. Good-bye now, my dear boy; I dare say the girls will see you to-morrow morning again."

"No, that they won't," interrupted Colonel Berkeley, "I won't have any of that nonsense—do you hear, girls? Be down for your own breakfast at nine, and don't be getting up at unearthly hours to say good-bye to a young scapegrace, who does not deserve that anyone should waste another thought upon him. Good-night, young fellow, I'm sorry you're the one out of them all to go to the dogs, but now not all your good looks will save you, so don't be trusting to them, but make up your mind to it at once. Many a better man than you has had to do it before you," growled the Colonel, "and all you have got to look to now is that you don't come

turning up again like a bad shilling that nobody has any use for. That is what your uncle Lord Bulmer means by sending you to the Antipodes; you're a bad shilling now, and that you'll remain, but don't take to turning up."

"Thank you, uncle, for wishing never to see me again," said Percy, with the crimson underlip quivering even more than usual; and then with Colonel Berkeley looking on to see that his injunctions were complied with, and the leave-takings not put off till next day, Percy said good-bye to his cousins, but Florence smiled as he did so, and he knew he should see her again.

She was up indeed most unnecessarily early the next morning, hoping that it might occur to Percy also to get up early, and beguiling the time, till he appeared, by choosing out the loveliest flower in all the garden for his button-hole. As she came back to the house with her hands full of dewy blossoms, from which to make her se-

lection, she was a little startled to see Fanny in the breakfast-room.

"Oh, Fanny! I did not think you would be up," she exclaimed, fearing a little now that Fanny might have obtained permission, and might begin scolding her for being up without it.

"Well, you see, dear, I knew you would be, and two are safe to be less scolded than one. You need not be frightened, I'll make myself scarce as soon as *he* appears, only I thought I'd countenance the proceeding, for you've helped me before now, and very likely may again, and one good turn deserves another. But has the boy overslept himself? he'll never be in time."

"The clock is fast, I think," said Florence, nervously glancing from her flowers to the clock, and from the clock to the flowers, and feeling hot and cold all at once.

"I hope cousin Percy will appreciate

that moss rose-bud," said Fanny, somewhat satirically, "it is very small, but then certainly it is very early in the year, and I hope the gardener may like missing it from the conservatory. Oh, you wasteful child, would not one flower do, but you must needs gather a whole handful? On occasions like this it is the sentiment of the gift that people value and not the quantity, and cousin Percy can never press all that lot in the leaves of his Bible, where of course like every true sailor he is bound to treasure up the gift of his lady-love. By-the-bye, has cousin Percy got a Bible at all—did you ever enquire that, my serious little sister?"

"Yes, he has," said Percy, sauntering listlessly through the half-open door at this moment, with anything but the air of a young man about to start upon a journey, "and I think it very impertinent of you to suspect me of having none. But I don't suppose you read yours much from what I

see of your goings on," he added, with a meaning look.

"You had better not waste your time supposing any such nonsense," she retorted, with a heightened colour; "if you don't set to work on your breakfast at once, you'll not be in time for your train; it will be sharp work even now."

"Oh, there is not any time for breakfast, and it is all nonsense trying to eat so early in the morning, I don't care about anything now. Are those flowers for me, Florrie?"

"Yes; at least, which will you have for your button-hole? you can't wear them all there, I know," said she, almost laughing in her nervous excitement, yet with strangely pale cheeks. "I could not make up my mind which you would like best, so I picked them all."

"Give them all to me then," said he, holding out his hand, "you don't want them yourself, you know; you can't put

them back on their plants now, and the gardener must know all about it, so you may as well let me take them away with me. I have not much else to take with me," and he put his arms round her, and kissed her, not exactly in a cousinly way, but Fanny had "made herself scarce" by this time, as she had before promised to do, and they were alone together now, clasped in each other's arms for the last time in their lives. Yes, as Percy had said the night before, it would never be the same again—never—never. At last it was she who bade him leave her.

"Think of me often, my darling," he said, "and wait for me patiently; you do not know how impatient I shall be. But promise you will think often of me."

"Oh, how can you ask me, when you know—you know—but be good, Percy, you will *try* to be good, will you not? promise me that, promise me you will try."

"Yes, I'll try. I *have* tried, Florence,

but—yes, I will try ; good-bye, my own darling."

"Good-bye," and Florence ran to the window to strain her eyes looking after him, and Percy crushed his hat down over his eyes, nor ever looked back once, and brushed by Fanny in the hall, and jumped into the dog-cart, that was to rattle him away from Paradise, without having an idea that Fanny was calling after him—"Good-bye, cousin Percy, I hope you will get on well in Australia," and the dog-cart rattled away, and for two people love's young dream was over and ended, and otherwise the world went on as before.

"Florence," said Fanny, going back into the breakfast-room, "may I ask if you are to be considered engaged to cousin Percy?"

Florence was watching a distant bend of the road, where she might catch the last glimpse of the dog-cart, that contained him, who was all the world to her ; she thought she saw it go by now, but the tears, which

would keep forming in her eyes in spite of herself, dazed her, and she could not be sure, so she winked them vigorously away, and continued to strain her eyes without answering. But no dog-cart passed, so she supposed it must have gone by already, and that it was that which she had seen mistily through her tears. She turned away from the window, there was nothing more she cared to see out there, now.

"I do not know about considered. I know I shall never marry any one else, or care about any one else—or any thing."

"I thought so once, myself," said Fanny.

"When Harry Bolton went to India?" asked Florence, raising her heavy eyes to her sister's face.

"Yes," said Fanny contemptuously, "and I've got over that, you see."

"I am different from you."

"Yes, you are a little goose now, but you will be wiser too some day, and see that cousin Percy with all his good looks,

as papa is always saying, would be the worst possible match for either of his fair cousins. Just as it would be the worst thing that could happen to him to marry one of us."

"I don't think so."

"Of course not, my little sister, of course not just now. But you will come to see it in time—if he does not break your heart first," she added, *sotto voce*.

But Florence heard her. "No man will ever do that for me," she exclaimed, angrily.

"What! are we so proud? this is a new feature. Certainly we are very different. It was not so difficult for a man to break my heart once, but I get on very well without it now—oh, very well!" and she began humming a tune to herself, then breaking off, "so if Percy never comes home again, it will not break your heart?"

"I can love him just as much in heaven."

"Oh, I daresay you could. I could not,

of course, but then we are different. Only that is not what I meant, I meant suppose he preferred to remain in Australia ?"

"Do you not think he loves me ? Oh, Fanny, you are older, and know more, and you are making me miserable. I know he loves me, but tell me that you think he does."

"Oh yes, he loves you well enough, child, and he looked perfectly heart-broken at going away ; I never saw any one look more so," said Fanny, with an emphasis upon the "I," as if no one else ever could have, if she had not. "As to poor me, he never saw me at all, though I was standing close beside him, and my affecting farewell might just as well not have been spoken for all he heard of it. Oh yes, he loves you well enough, child, now, so run up-stairs, and bathe your eyes, and don't look so woe-begone. Recollect tears are very bad for the eyes, and I know somebody who thinks yours the prettiest pair he has ever seen.

It is very bad taste of course, but still I do know somebody who thinks so."

Later on in the day the gentle mother came to take a turn in the garden, seeing Florence sauntering about there listlessly alone.

"Poor, dear Percy," she said, "I do hope he may get on well; we shall all miss him very much, shall we not, darling?"

"I suppose so," said Florence. She would have liked to tell the mother all—the mother who had always made a little confidante of her, but she knew how much her mother had to bear, and how any worry used up the little strength she had; and Florence knew too, how very full of sorrow for her her mother would be, if she knew all, and so never having told her anything of the love for Percy, that had brought her so much joy, and now brought so much pain, she shrank now more than ever from telling her mother of it, and meaning to *tell* her nothing, she could not grow sym-

pathetic over the sorrow of her cousin's going away. He was not her cousin to her—he was her lover.

"For some reasons I am glad though," Mrs. Berkeley went on thoughtfully. "He has never seemed to take to her; indeed I think he has always preferred you, but I have been so afraid he might take to Fanny. He is only a boy, but he is very good-looking, and it would have flattered her vanity, for in this quiet place she can't have many admirers, and she is a sad flirt, and so she would have drawn him on and on, till there would have been one of those hopeless engagements—of which I have such a horror. Or else if she had not got to care for him, she might still have made him care for her, for Fanny is very attractive, when she chooses, and men all seem to like her; and then she would have thrown him over without a moment's compunction, and that would have vexed me very much for both their sakes—though of

course it would be the best ending there could be to anything so very silly as any flirtation between them. Now I am really very thankful that he has gone away without anything of the kind. Dear Florence, what a comfort it is you are so young still—but I hope you will never take to flirting, my child," and the mother stroked her little daughter's hair caressingly with her soft white hand.

"I do not think you need be afraid for me, dearest," said Florence. "I am not handsome like Fanny, and nobody would care about flirting with me."

"Don't be too sure of that, darling. When people are fond of flirting, they will take to anyone they can get. Poor dear Fanny! I should be very glad to see her happily married, but there is no use in troubling oneself about such things. To think how anxious I was about her and Percy Gordon, when your papa first invited him to come to the house whenever he

liked, and now he is going to Australia, and I don't think they ever liked each other as much as cousins ought to. But there is your papa looking for me; I must go and see what he wants," and Mrs. Berkeley glided away again through the narrow garden walks, gathering her dress carefully round her, lest it should brush against any of the tender shoots, and thus hurt the opening blossoms.

Oh, talk of love being blind! there is nothing half so blind as fathers and mothers — not sisters certainly. Fanny Berkeley sat by the open window, impatiently turning over the pages of the last new novel, and as she turned them, she looked out now and again at Florence, wandering listlessly among the flowers.

"Yes, she's hard hit, certainly," soliloquised that very slangy young lady, "and she'll never be the same again; she is quite right there. I know Flo, and I know this is just the very worst thing that could have

happened to her, at her age especially. But now I wonder how she'll take it, when she hears the bad news, that is sure to come of him sooner or later. In my opinion it is an even toss up whether she goes into a sisterhood, or becomes even aster than her sister Fanny, and she might have been such a nice girl too. But, heigh ho, how does this book go on? Why people should write such prosy novels, I can't imagine ; who cares to hear what the hero's politics are?—not I, I am sure. Well, I can't stand that child's moping about any longer, I'll get her to take a walk with me. Here, Flo, I want you to go down to the village with me ; now don't be more than a year titivating yourself, for I'm in a hurry."

CHAPTER II.

"KNOWLEDGE COMES, BUT WISDOM LINGERS."

How long those summer days seemed to Florence Berkeley after Percy Gordon had gone away! She read, and worked hard to improve her mind in every way she could think of, for she knew that Percy valued a cultivated mind, and she wanted to make herself more worthy of him; but still the time hung very heavily. Fanny went away to London to enjoy a little of the season, and after a few weeks there, coolly wrote to inform her family of her engagement to a Mr. Frederick Anson, in the Hussars; she did not ask for their consent, taking that for granted. And soon after she wrote again

to say that Lady Bulmer, with whom she had been a good deal thrown lately, was going down to Cowes for a time, and had invited her to accompany her, and as Mr. Anson had just bought a yacht, she thought her time might pass very pleasantly there. She very amiably offered to come home notwithstanding, if her presence were in any way needed, not taking this matter so much into her own hands as that of her engagement. As it was, however, no one specially needed her at St. James's Cray, so she went to Cowes, and yachted, and danced, and flirted there, to her heart's content, as also to the great satisfaction of Lady Bulmer, who liked to be surrounded by a train of young men, but had not sufficient powers of fascination to attract them for herself. Till at last one sultry September afternoon Mrs. Berkeley received an even curter note than usual from her eldest daughter, informing her that her engagement was at an end, she

and Mr. Anson having mutually agreed that after all they were not at all suited to one another, and that she hoped somebody would meet her at the station by the 5.10 train next day, as she intended coming home at once.

When she did arrive, it was difficult for anyone to decide whether she had jilted Mr. Anson, or he her. But if anyone had observed it—which, as it happened, nobody did—they might perhaps have been rather enlightened by seeing a tall, very blond man, with long, pulled-down whiskers, descend from the same carriage, which the fair Fanny had occupied, only a few minutes after she had quitted it, and just as she and "her people" had cleared off the railway platform. If anyone had noticed him, they might have recognised in him a certain Mr. O'Neile, who although quartered at Woolwich at the beginning of the summer, had not seldom found himself in the pleasant country lanes of St. James's

Cray, before the fair Fanny took herself off to town.

Somebody else had also found him in those pleasant lanes on one eventful April evening, when a little to the discomfiture of Paddy, and yet more to that of Fanny Berkeley, who of course quite by chance, happened to be leaning in a carelessly picturesque attitude over a certain stile, as the gallant officer came sauntering up to it—equally of course quite by chance—who should bound over the hedge—but Percy Gordon!—who, lifting his hat in the most courteous manner first to one, and then to the other, remarked with a significant smile, it was a pleasant evening for a walk, and went on his way, rejoicing in the hold this little incident would give him over his always dangerous, and sometimes slightly troublesome cousin, Fanny.

This was the man who had now travelled down from town with Fanny Berkeley—not further, I give you my honour. She

had had quite another companion up from Portsmouth: yes, she was a nice young lady to go travelling about the country *alone.*

Though no one could make out from Fanny's appearance how she felt about her broken-off engagement, she saw with one glance of those dangerous eyes of hers, what turn matters were taking at home.

"Poor mamma!" she said to herself, having retired to her room, and proceeding to take off her outer garments, and prepare for dinner. "What a sorrowful life hers must have been, I should think. I am sorry I did not come home sooner; but then I never have got on with her exactly, so it would not have been much use. I wonder if she has found out about Percy Gordon now, and if it is that, that is wearing her life away. She has always loved Florence better than anyone, and how crushed that poor child looks! Now if I were a man, would not I fall in love with

her! that pale patient face of hers would haunt me. Oh, Percy Gordon, what you have to answer for! I knew how it would be, I saw through him at once, and to think he was flirting with that wretched little Mrs. Brown all the time! Well, let her console Frederick Anson now, if she can. Oh, if I can't pay off old scores on the right man, I'll do it on the wrong, or my name is not Fanny Berkeley."

Here Florence glided into the room with the soft silent step she seemed to have learnt from the gentle mother, so different from her light springy walk in the old days.

"Can I help you, Fanny? Jane is not well to-day, so I told her to lie still, and that I would come and do what I could for you. Peel of course is always busy with mamma now."

"Has she looked like this for long, Florence?"

"Like what?" Florence stood quite

still, and stared at her sister with wide-open eyes.

"Like dying, little Flo. She has often been ill before, poor mamma, but never like this. Surely you must have seen it?"

"No, Fanny, I never saw it." Florence's lips remained still parted after she had finished speaking, and the under-lip trembled a little, but that was the only sign of emotion she gave; though Fanny noticed after a while that her hands were tightly clasped together, very tightly, for the knuckles were grown quite white, she saw.

"How patient she is," thought Fanny; "will nothing startle her out of that miserable composure?" Then she said aloud, "Florence, have you ever heard from Percy Gordon?"

Florence moved quickly away at this, and stooping over one of Fanny's boxes, began to remove its contents.

"No, Fanny," she said again, as if she

were a machine, that could say nothing else. But after that she turned the tables on her sister, by asking, "Are you sorry about your engagement being broken off, Fanny?"

"Sorry! of course not," said Fanny, indignantly. "I don't look as if I were wearing the willow, do I? I have only come home because at this time of year Brighton is the only place to go to, and as all the Ansons are going there in force, I thought I'd rather not just at present. And home is a capital place for wearing out old clothes, if it is good for nothing else, and that is rather a necessity for me now, for after a month and a-half in town, and two months at Cowes, my finances are somewhat low, as you may imagine, my very sensible little sister."

"It must be a dreadful thing to break off an engagement though. I don't think it can be right, Fanny; you've been engaged three times now."

"Have I?" said Fanny carelessly, "really, I don't remember."

"There are not any more I don't know of, are there?" and for the first time Florence raised her head, and looked round at her sister with sad questioning eyes.

"Really I don't know who you do know of. I don't keep a little memorandum of my former lovers to refer to, and as soon as they are done with, I—forget them."

"Can you?" Florence paused in her unpacking. Fanny smiled. "Oh, Fanny, you are not engaged to anyone now?"

"Well, no; not to any one in particular." Florence's eyes dilated with horror. "My dear child, don't look as if you thought I was engaged to half-a-dozen at once. But, as you don't happen to be my father confessor—why, I don't see why I should submit to be cross-questioned by you."

"But Fanny—Mr. Anson—did you ever care for him?"

"Frederick Anson? oh yes, he valses

capitally, and is one of the best-dressed men about town; but you see, my dear, I don't really care whether a man is well-dressed, or even whether he is good-looking. What I care for is a man who adores me, and goes into fits if I do but look at another man. And Frederick Anson did not do that; no, he took to flirting with somebody else on his own account—a certain Mrs. Brown, whom by the way somebody else found very fascinating, when he was—well, let us be polite, and call it—studying at Portsmouth. It may be all very well for you to put up with that kind of thing, but it won't suit my book, I can tell you."

Florence turned white, and she was about to speak, then on a sudden her cheeks grew scarlet, and a hard, proud expression came over her face, such as Fanny had never seen there before. She would not deign to ask any questions, or even to enter upon such a subject, as to whether Percy Gordon had flirted with anyone else in between his

visits to St. James's Cray, and Fanny began to be sorry that she had ever hinted at such a thing. Sooner or later Florence would be sure to hear that Percy was not true to her, for Fanny did not believe in any man's being so for long—no one had ever been so to her, and surely she should know, who had tried so many—but she had never meant needlessly to pain her little sister before hand, and it was with some compunction she now advanced toward her, saying :—

"Thank you, child, but don't bother any more unpacking. I've got all I want for the present, and stooping will give you a headache, as it always does me."

But Florence said it did not tire her, and so the two went on together, till as they were putting away what they had unpacked, Florence took up Fanny's parasol, and with more animation than she had shown hitherto exclaimed :—

"Oh Fanny, what a really beautiful para-

sol! I never saw such a lovely silver handle. Who did give it to you? surely you can't have bought it—was it Lady Bulmer?"

"No, indeed. It was not likely she should ever give me anything half so handsome. It was somebody who had the good taste at the time to think me the most beautiful creature he had ever seen, and therefore worthy of the most beautiful parasol."

"Mr. Anson? and you never gave it back, Fanny!" and dropping the parasol as if it now burnt her fingers, Florence walked out of the room.

"Well, well," grumbled Fanny as she picked up the parasol, "I returned all the others, and of course he'll think I forgot this, or something or other. Dear me, I am sure it was only fair I should keep something, for I amused him much better than he amused me while our engagement lasted. So Florence does not think me fit to speak to, does not she? well, I don't care. She is a little innocent, and I should only do

her harm; it is a great pity we were ever born sisters."

Yes, so it was, a very great pity; Fanny spoke truth there, as indeed she generally did, though in a way peculiar to herself. And then Fanny, who was fond of Florence through it all, waxed wrathful over the remembrance of her sister's pale cheeks, and as she could not avenge her on Percy Gordon on the instant, once more vowed vengeance on mankind in general.

Florence had gone to her own room, and finding that hot and stifling, thence wandered out upon the lawn, and there she came upon the Rev. Cyril Thornton, who, directly on seeing her, advanced towards her, as if he had been looking for her, and so he had, for he had, as he thought, some very serious news to break to her. But Fanny, as it happened, had already prepared Florence for it, and so directly Mr. Thornton began she knew what was coming.

Mr. Thornton had been reading with Mrs.

Berkeley, who for some time past now had been too weak to go to church, and coming out from her room he had met Dr. Filby, who, calling him aside, had requested the clergyman to undertake the painful office, which he himself shrank from, namely that of breaking to Mrs. Berkeley's family that her case was a hopeless one. For a variety of reasons, Mr. Thornton preferred telling Florence, and leaving her to tell her father, to breaking the sad news himself at once to Colonel Berkeley, so he was glad now to come upon Florence Berkeley on the lawn. Yet it was a very painful office he had undertaken, even then, and it was a relief when Florence held out her hand and said:

"Thank you, Mr. Thornton. I know what it is you want to tell me, and how kindly you would do it; but I had never thought of it before to-day, and I can't bear to speak of it yet. Fanny saw it at once, or I never should. Dear, dear mamma! thank

you very much, but it is very dreadful to have the only person who loves one taken away, and I can't bear it yet."

"There will always be many people to love you, and——"

"No, no, there will be no one—no one now," and Florence held out her hand once more as a sort of apology for her abruptness, and then ran away to sob over her grief unseen; and Mr. Thornton went away with an aching heart for the pain which he almost fancied for the moment was of his inflicting, and wished he had known before that Miss Berkeley had come home. Though she was no particular friend of his, it would have been the easiest thing in the world to tell her anything, and it had not been very easy to him to speak to Florence. Besides he shrunk from thinking how the child would tell her father; she had all too much responsibility laid upon her already for one so young; he felt pained, now that he had done it, to think he should have been the

man to add yet another burden to those that already were her portion.

It was all over very soon after that, and before another month had passed away, there was one more grave in the churchyard of St. James's Cray, and an aching want in Colonel Berkeley's household, felt more or less by every member of it. Colonel Berkeley himself was utterly crushed by his loss; and though he might be said to have killed his wife, as truly as if he had himself poured out the poison for her, and then forced her to drink of it, yet now he sorrowed for her as deeply as if he had never spoken an angry word to her, nor made her life a burden to her for all the six and twenty weary years during which she had been a faithful wife to him.

Florence went to church, and to her Sunday school, and to the old woman in the village, to whom she had been accustomed to read, and read herself the deep, difficult books which she had before set herself to read, and went about all her daily avoca-

tions just as usual. But when they were over, when she could say to herself that she had done her day's work, she would shut herself up in her own room, and pray, pray long passionate prayers, that if God would not in mercy bid her follow the gentle loving mother He had taken to Himself, He would give her strength, greater than what she could ever have of herself, to bear the life that now lay changed before her. She did not know why she dreaded it so much, but she felt that now all would be different for her henceforward, and her forebodings were not long in being realised.

One chance she had of bringing about a tranquil, if not a happy future for herself; it was but a chance, but still in her misery then, and worse still, in her fear of greater misery yet to come, she might have clutched at it, had she not already realised the great truth, that it is not our happiness, which we have to seek out on earth, in that anxious search in which we are all of us more or less

engaged ; alas, so many of us less ! It was not right for her to have this happiness, she knew ; and though it was tempting for its very quietness and moderation, she bravely put it from her. This was how it came about. St. James's Cray had become hateful to Colonel Berkeley ; his already enfeebled constitution was sinking under the sorrow that he now felt for his wife, and Dr. Filby recommended change of air and climate. Fanny, to whom this present melancholy seemed but a thing to be eschewed, and put away as speedily as possible, strongly seconded this advice, and so it had been decided that the Berkeleys should go to Nice, and it was now but a few days before that fixed on for their departure, when Florence, coming home from saying good-bye to some of her village friends, found Mr. Thornton lying in wait for her in the shrubbery. He had known her ever since she was a baby, for St. James's Cray was a family living, and he

had stepped into it as quite a young man; and often in her childish days, and quite of late too sometimes, he had helped Florence in her studies, and had often flattered himself that he was moulding the young girl's character, and taken pleasure in it as partly his own work. Now he wished to have a right given him to take pleasure in it as yet more his own; he would not have asked for that right now, when Florence was still so young and ignorant of the world, and when her grief for her mother's loss was yet so recent, but that she was going away, and he knew too well with what unfit protectors.

He longed to be her protector himself, to guard her as such a beautiful delicate flower seemed to him to require to be guarded, and yet more than this, he longed to hear that some day—not quite at once, of course—but that some day she might be the comfort of his home, and the sunshine of his life. Something of all this he told Flo-

rence, telling her also that she was the only girl he had ever loved, and that he loved her better than his life, oh, a thousand times better. And Florence listened to him very sadly, and thanked him very humbly for the honour that he did her, but told him that it could never be—it was impossible that she should love him. And as she spoke she thought to herself how her father and her sister were not like a father or a sister to her, and her mother had been taken away from her, and that this man was her friend, had always been her friend, and was now the only one she had—for of Percy Gordon she had heard nothing, no one had heard anything since he went away so long ago ; and she wondered vaguely what life would be like passed with her friend, and it seemed to her it would be very different to the life, she now expected would be hers—a different and a better life. She thought highly of Mr. Thornton, very highly ; he was her friend, and yet she had

always been accustomed to look up to him, always thought he did her honour by being her friend, and did her now a very great honour indeed, she thought—such an one as she never could have dreamt of for herself; so she spoke humbly as well as sadly, as she put it from her. Then Mr. Thornton told her she was yet too young to know her own mind, and that he did not even ask for her love now, he only wished her to know how he loved her, that she might feel she could always turn to him, were she ever in any difficulty or danger, and then he proceeded very carefully, and very delicately —for Mr. Thornton was a gentleman—to depict the dangers that might beset her, going abroad with such an elder sister as Fanny, and no better protector than her father, broken down too now in health; and he asked her solemnly to promise him, that if she ever were in need of a friend she would apply to him without a moment's hesitation.

But there was some one else whose right it was to be that kind of friend she thought, though whether he were dead or alive, she knew not; still, till she did know, she thought it was his right, and could be no other man's, so she answered in her firm, simple tones—"No, I cannot promise any such thing, though I thank you all the same. I will always think of you as a friend—one of my best and kindest friends—but I will not promise to apply to you in any difficulty, for I know I could never do it, so it would be no use promising. I don't think I could ever bring myself to ask help of any one; but depend upon it," and here she looked up with one of the sweetest smiles Mr. Thornton had seen upon her face for many a long day, and once again her eyes looked like spring violets, sparkling with morning dew, "depend upon it, if there ever is anything that I shall *want* you to do for me, I shall ask you to do it, for I know you will. You always

have indeed, as long as I can remember, and that makes me the more sorry for the pain I am giving you now. But I cannot help it, indeed I cannot help it," she pleaded, very humbly; "and please do not think of me any more—at least, not in this way; please not."

"I shall always think of you all my life long."

"But it is not right—I cannot—I am not—"

"You are not engaged to any one else?"

Mr. Thornton stooped and gazed into the pale and drooping face, and Florence hesitated, and glanced round as if for some way of escape. As she did so, a bare wet branch brushed lightly against her face, but all lightly though it did so, it sent a chill to her very heart, it was so cold and dripping, and she recollected—not that she had ever forgotten it for a moment, she never passed this spot without remembering it, but this brought it back more vividly to

her mind—how that it was here she and Percy had stood together that sorrowful sunshiny May afternoon. Then the trees were bent down with their weight of golden and lilac blossoms, and all the air was sweet with their fragrance, and merry with the humming of the bees; now the boughs were laden with the rain-drops, and the air heavy with autumnal vapours, and nothing would come into Florence's mind but those all too beautiful lines of Keats'—"In a drear nighted December," and she could not answer anything to Mr. Thornton's question. However, it was not necessary for her to answer. Mr. Thornton had known her from a child, and he knew that there was no one she could be engaged to but Percy Gordon, and though Percy had once and again given him very miserable moments, yet he had mostly been at St. James's Cray on the clergyman's busy days, so that the latter had seen less of the two together than he would otherwise have

done, and Percy had gone away long ago now, and nothing had ever been heard of him since, so that Mr. Thornton had quite given up all thought of him. Now, after a moment's consideration, he at once dismissed from his mind the idea, that Florence could be engaged to anyone, as an absurdity, and then he proceeded with his wooing in a very different style.

He pleaded now not for her sake, but for his own. He told her that he needed a wife, a comforter ; that he had no near relations, very few friends ; that he had long known it was not good for any man to lead such a lonely life as that which he had accustomed himself to, and that he had never needed a friend more than now.

"Evil spirits seem to come and mock at me," he said ; "I feel too, as if they were daily gaining power over me, though I know not how it is, but sometimes I fancy that I have thought and read too much. And yet how that can be I know not, for

it has ever been in a humble spirit. Yet by means of this, or in spite of this, I know not, all has become confused to me, and the more I think, the greater the confusion, till at last I know not what I believe, or whether indeed I believe anything. Ah! the *Times* may write of our difficulties in its cool tone of calm superiority, and the *Saturday Review* may sneer at them, but the life of an English clergyman is a very troublous one now-a-days. I have gone with the Ritualists, as far as they go, and I have sought to stop with them where they stopped, but in vain; I can find no footing there; all seems for ever slipping away, and unless you, like the angel from heaven that I think you, will take pity upon me and help me with your surer simpler faith, I feel that, though against my own convictions now, yet assuredly I shall ere long join the unhappy band of perverts, as that most miserable creature of all, a perjured priest. Nothing can save me

but one thing. If I could think that you might some day bring yourself to care for me as more than a friend, I should see that there was some happiness somewhere. It would give my thoughts a healthier tone ; it would give me some hope, and then, with God's help, I trust I should be able yet, ere it is too late, to regain the mastery over my mind, which, alas ! somehow—how I know not—but somehow I have chanced to lose. For I know that the Romanists are not right ; I know it as yet, but I shall not be able to know it long, not unless some person, who can, will help me ; and child though you are, you are that person if you will—you, and you alone—if you only will !"

" Oh ! Mr. Thornton, do not tell me that I can help you. Not if I could be your wife—which I never could be—but not if I could be, can I think that it would be possible for me to help you in your doubts. As you say, I am a child, and you are a

man, and how often have you not talked to me of man's powers of reason, his noblest heritage, his proud prerogative? Women may perhaps be guided by their feelings, and guided aright, but surely it cannot be so with men?"

"Yet it is 'with the heart man believeth unto righteousness.' It is unreasoning faith, that saves men, as well as women, in the end."

"Yes—yes—I know I cannot argue. It would be absurd if I, only a girl, were to try to convince you, who are so much older, and more educated. But I am sure of one thing: if you are convinced it is right to be a Roman Catholic, it would be wrong for you to remain in the Church of England because—because of me. And I am sure you would not do it," she added, looking up confidingly into her companion's face.

"But I am not convinced—I am not. I am convinced of nothing."

"Before you became a clergyman, you must have thought of it seriously; very seriously, I am sure, *you* must have thought of it. Can you not recall now what made you think the Articles of the English Church so binding then—what made you believe its teaching?"

"With my mind I can, but nothing more. What brought conviction to me then brings it no longer. I do not wonder that it seems absurd to you. Miserable though I am, it seems absurd to me at times; but do not think of the absurdity of it, only believe me, for I know it—that if I had any hope you would one day be my wife, it *would* clear up my doubts; it would make life all seem less tangled to me, and—but if you cannot—you cannot," and Mr. Thornton stopped, recollecting how at the beginning he had thought he must not press his suit at all—that with so young a girl, it would not be acting as a man of honour to do so; and so he stopped now,

and drew himself up, and tried to look once more like the cultivated, somewhat stately gentleman, that Florence had known all her life, instead of the despairing lover and miserable doubter, in which character he had but now shown himself to her on this afternoon for the first time.

And Florence understood the meaning of his gesture, and respected him for it, and wished, wished very much now, though not for herself at all now, only for him, that she could have said in answer to that despairing final irrevocable "you cannot"—"but I can." Not that for a moment she was faithless to Percy; not that for one moment she loved him one whit less than when he last stood with her here on this very spot, where she and Mr. Thornton were now standing; but that she saw Cyril Thornton, though a weaker man than she had ever credited him, yet was a very generous man, not only seeking his own happiness, but also, and rather than

his own happiness, the happiness of those he loved; and she knew he was a very good man, earnestly striving to do what was right, though at present having lost the clue to find out what was that right, and she knew he was an educated and a very talented man, and she thought, as any at all enthusiastic girl would have thought in her place, that this man was worth saving to the Church, and that it would be almost glorious to give up her own chance of any great future happiness in order to save him. Of late too her own chance of great future happiness had seemed very visionary to her, and the life that she might lead as the mistress of Mr. Thornton's house presented a far less gloomy prospect than that which she pictured as awaiting herself; but not for one moment was she false to Percy Gordon, to whom she had plighted her troth—a troth that was to last for ever. So, though the wish did pass through her mind, just so far passed as to enable her to

think to herself that she did not really wish it, she answered very firmly, yet kindly also—

"I cannot." Then she went on, "And, talking thus, we are mixing up two things, which you yourself would be the first at any other time to say ought never to be mixed. I am very sorry that you should be so unsettled in your religious ideas, and the more so because almost all that I have ever learnt about religion I have learnt from you, and I cannot think how you should now be dissatisfied with what seems to me so beautiful and perfect, and never more so than lately. But I cannot grieve myself, as indeed I know it is the last thing you mean me to do, with thinking that I can do you any good, and only I. If you pray to be guided rightly, surely it must come right? and then you must study, and there are so many wise, good men, you can consult. Oh! I cannot believe you will ever feel called upon to leave our mother

Church, for I am sure it is the right one, and I suppose it is only being so much cleverer makes you see difficulties which I don't; and then that same cleverness will surely make you able to explain the difficulties also. You mean to do right, and to think rightly, I know you do; and so it must all come right in the end," and then Florence Berkeley held out her hand, and Mr. Thornton clasped it in both his, and looked at her face as if he had not got it all by heart already, but was learning it at that moment; and then he turned away, and walked slowly home through the shrubbery, a miserable beaten man.

He thought of Florence Berkeley—of nothing but Florence Berkeley—till he entered his study, and there saw all the piles of controversial literature strewn about his table, which he had read all too often for his own comfort already; and then he remembered Florence's advice to him to study, and he dropped into a chair, and

covered his face with his hands, and groaned aloud.

Later on he got up, and stood for a long time wrapt in contemplation of a picture of the Blessed Virgin. He had not come to kneeling yet, but he was praying notwithstanding, while he stood there contemplating the calm, beautiful, girlish face (it was a copy of one of Murillo's very youthful Virgins), and after that he sat down at his study table, and wrote. It was a letter to the Lord Bishop of the Diocese that Cyril Thornton wrote then, after that long, silent contemplation of his picture of the Blessed Virgin, praying him to accept his resignation of the living of St. James's Cray, since, tormented as he was by doubts, he felt he could no longer conscientiously hold it; though as yet he knew not himself what the end of his doubts might be.

He thought he was thus only setting himself free to come to what end his convictions might hereafter bring him, and

having written his letter, he went out at once and posted it himself, fearing lest he might change his mind about it again, for this was a step he had not much considered, and he only persuaded himself to it now, by thinking that this step itself decided nothing, only left him free to come to what decision he might hereafter choose; but when he came back, the first thing that met his eye on entering his study was Murillo's Virgin, and it seemed to him that the dark blue eyes smiled upon him just as Florence Berkeley, who always reminded him of the picture, and of whom the picture reminded him in its turn, had once smiled upon him that afternoon, the first time for many a long day, and whether it was a thought of his earthly love, who was never to be his, or of the heavenly queen, who was henceforward to be his guiding-star, that moved the unhappy man, he fell upon his knees in a transport of devotion, and for the first time prayed to

"Mary, Queen of heaven," to pity and befriend him.

Truly that was a sorrowful day for the Reverend Cyril Thornton.

CHAPTER III.

"ALAS! I HAVE NOR HOPE NOR HEALTH."

WHEN Percy Gordon arrived in Queensland, the part of Australia upon which he had fixed to retrieve his fallen fortunes in, he was met at once by his cousin Tom Vavasor, who, having some business in Brisbane, had thought he might as well kill two birds with one stone, and at the same time welcome his cousin to the new country.

Tom and George Vavasor were younger sons of a good old English family, that in these latter days had come to be more highly connected than highly endowed. Had they remained in England they would

have been poor, and they were without any such qualities as could atone for what is now pretty well established as a crime against the laws of civilized society; for they were destitute of good looks, good manners, or good abilities, which last I have mentioned last, as being only valuable in society as a promise of future wealth, whereas the two other qualities serve the more graceful, though less useful purpose of veiling its deficiency. On the other hand in Queensland these two young men with broad shoulders, good constitutions, and kindly hearts, took easily the places they found waiting vacant for them, and soon held up their heads with the best men in the colony; but they had had a good deal of roughing to go through with first.

However, that was over some time before Percy Gordon arrived at Brisbane, wearied with the long sea-voyage, disgusted with the rough lot among whom he found him-

self thrown, disgusted above all with himself for being there, and crushed by the consciousness which he could no longer withstand, that he was to blame, and that it was all his own doing. *Mea culpa!* always the bitterest drop in the bitterest cup man can ever have to drink! Percy Gordon sank under it; he could not bring himself to write to any one, not even to Florence, but he thought of her very often —as something unattainable, unutterably sweet indeed, but between which and him there was a great gulf fixed; never now, as the sweet child cousin, who was to ripen into yet more perfect womanhood, and to ripen waiting for him, till he should come back with a fortune to claim her for his wife. No, while she had been hanging on his arm, and he had been gazing down into the depths of those dewy violets, her eyes, it had been very natural to talk to her in this strain, it had indeed been impossible to him to talk otherwise, but now

Percy Gordon knew that the happy vision could never be realised. A fortune might be made without capital, but it could never be made without hope, and Percy Gordon had no hope.

He had gone on from one mad folly to another, carried on by the wild excitability of his nature, and now all that excitability was gone, crushed out of him; and he knew that not one of his grand relations, not one of his old comrades, not one even of his best friends, and he had many very dear friends, not one person in all the world —except, perhaps, one simple, loving girl— ever expected to hear any good of him again; and he had no confidence in his own opinion to stand against that of all the world.

So his manner grew quieter than of old —a gentle, subdued manner it was now, far too languid a manner for a man who had his way to make in the world—and his eyes gained a "thoughtful, sorrowful

expression, such as no one would ever have dreamt of seeing in them in the old jolly gun-room days, and altogether when Percy Gordon landed at Brisbane, he was the very picture of a man to make his fortune in any drawing-room in May Fair, of a man to look perfectly irresistible leaning over the railings of Rotten Row ; but as unlike as it was possible to look to a man who was to do good work, squatting in a recently formed colony. His very intonation was too refined. Percy himself almost laughed at the absurd contrast his pretty well-turned words of courtesy made with the rough heartiness of Tom or George Vavasor, whilst as to Tom and George they shook their wise heads despairingly over him.

"The last kind of fellow we want out here. Well, well, he can't be sent back again now, poor lad ; let's tell him we think he can be useful to us, and make what we can out of him. He'll never do

to go up country," said one of the brothers, and so it was settled.

For the first six months at least Percy Gordon was to make himself generally useful to his cousins, meanwhile looking about him to see for an opening for himself. And at first he did make himself very useful, suggesting many ingenious little appliances by which labour might be economised, and the brothers began to think they had been mistaken about him, and that he had a turn for mechanics, and with such a head-piece was by no means a man to be sneezed at.

But Percy Gordon had never been made for drudgery, and it was drudgery that he had to do now, drudgery too with no hope of a golden future, up to which it would one day surely lead him, and each day it became more hateful to him. He hated the work, he hated the climate, he hated the place, above all he hated the want of refinement in all those about him.

Even the kindly cousins with their rough hearty ways were distasteful to him, and while they were peacefully sleeping the sleep of the righteous after a good day's work, Percy Gordon would pace restlessly up and down, brooding over all the wretched mess he had made of his life, and how he had no one to thank for it but himself. No wonder he knocked up under it; true he plodded on, but it was only plodding now, there were no more brilliant contrivances, there was no heart put into his work.

The Vavasors shook their heads over him more than ever.

"If he knocks up under this, what would he do up in the bush by himself, roughing it as we had to do when we first came out?" asked one brother, and the other brother had no answer to make.

So they settled in their own wise heads that the six months must become a perpetuity, though like the manly men they

were, they fretted a little over the lad, who had no prospects. Here again Percy Gordon took them by surprise; though he was clearly getting ill now, though it was evident it was no longer only lack of energy, but lack of strength also, that now kept him from doing more, his spirits seemed to rise. He talked quite confidently now of what he would do, when he went to settle by himself, and reclaim new land. Up to this time he had never talked at all of this, except when some one else began the subject, and then always gloomily and unwillingly. The brothers were strong hearty men, they knew nothing of the fever of illness, and they thought the climate of Queensland perfect, and that no one could be long ailing there, and so when they saw the lad's heart seemed set upon it, they let him go, though not without some reluctance, and first making a hundred little arrangements to smooth his path for him, such as they would never have thought of

for themselves, helping him not a little with advice too, and also with money, before they sent him off, and bade him God speed.

Then for a year and more Percy Gordon made a good fight for it in the bush, a better fight than any one in the world, except one, would probably have credited him with the power of making, and after that he gave it up altogether, and fought no more at all, only longed that death might come quickly, since nothing else but death could surely end it now.

Once more his cousins were good Samaritans to him, and this time they got a friend of theirs to be a still better Samaritan than they could ever be, and Jack Rivers, the richest man in the colony, took Percy Gordon into his comfortable house near Brisbane, and saw that he had the best doctoring the colony could give him. There, surrounded by some of the luxuries of the old world, and by many of the

luxuries of the new, Percy Gordon soon began to revive. It was like a coming back to real life to him, this fresh taste of civilisation, with Evelyn Rivers, the flower of the colony, ever flitting about him, bringing him delicate blossoms from her garden, or singing him her last song, or, better still, sitting at his feet in one of those pretty negligé attitudes she particularly affected, gazing up at him with her large dark gazelle-like eyes, and listening to his high-flown rhapsodies.

For Percy Gordon could rhapsodize again, now that he had come back to life once more, and had got a listener so entirely after his own heart, and when, with renewed strength he went back to the hateful bush life again, the vision of Evelyn Rivers, with her tiny well-set head, her coils of gold-brown hair, dark gazelle-like eyes, and light lithe figure, would often haunt his dreams, or even stand before him in his waking hours, making all around seem

yet more dreary by the contrast with its own delicate brightness. He had long ago given up all thoughts of Florence Berkeley. Not to speak of that recent illness, the voyage out to Australia had been to Percy Gordon like the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and he did not feel as if he were faithless to his early love. At this time he would gladly have made her his wife any day, if it had been possible, but he knew it never would be possible, so now Evelyn Rivers was the mistress of his heart's young dreams, though she would have seemed every whit as unattainable to Percy Gordon, had he ever thought of her as his possible wife; but this he never did even in his wildest fancies. Still the recollection of her haunted him, and he thought of her as the loveliest girl he had ever seen, and it seemed that that last taste of the luxury of life had demoralised Percy, and this time he made no fight at all in the bush, but just dragged on.

One day he had grown so hopeless, that he had almost made up his mind to go back to his cousins, and ask them to let him make himself generally useful again, and so drudge on the rest of his days; he had almost brought himself to this—would have quite done so, if he had had energy enough left in him to be able to decide to do anything, when he had an unexpected interview—an unexpected interview of a very unexpected nature. And all his life after, when most driven to reproach himself, Percy always looked back upon that interview as one in which he might lawfully take pleasure, as one occasion at the least, in which no one could say he had not conducted himself as a man and a gentleman. That interview was with Jack Rivers.

"Holloa! young fellow," said Jack Rivers, riding up to the squatter's tent, and entering it in his usual boisterous manner, having first picketted his horse

outside in approved bush fashion. "Holloa, young fellow; so you are turning seedy again. How ever you manage it in this climate I can't understand."

Percy was lying down wrapped in a rug, his head supported by a clumsy, wooden box; there might as well have been a pillow between the hard wood and his head, but in some states of wretchedness there is a pleasure in a little discomfort such as this. He did not speak now; he had been lying there silent all day, and he was too far gone to be equal to any speech at first with this unexpected visitor, but he smiled one of his sweet, sorrowful smiles—such a smile as no young lady in her teens could possibly have resisted—but still a smile that did not count for much in the bush, where smiles are little worth, and men mostly too hard working to take note of them.

"You'll have to be looking us up again soon, if you go on at this rate," continued

Jack Rivers the good-natured, in loud, jolly tones, only the jollier for the other's languid silence. He thought the lad wanted rousing,—and so he did.

"Thank you, you are very kind," murmured Percy Gordon.

"Kind?—not a bit of it. No one ever called Jack Rivers kind. No, no; none of that. The question is, when will you come —and how will you get to us?"

"I am afraid it can't be managed;" he had raised himself upon his elbow, when he spoke before; now he sank down again, half turning away, as if indignant at the idea of succour, seeing he was in such bad case.

"Why, you're not so ill as all that," and Jack Rivers drew nearer, and looked him all over,—much as he would have looked at one of his horses or bullocks, if told that it was ailing. "Oh, we'll soon set you on your legs again, when we get you among us. Think how much good it did you, last time."

"Yes, and I can never thank you enough for your kindness to me then; but I am afraid it was spent upon an ungrateful subject. You see here I am, good for nothing again;—not that I am afraid I ever have been good for anything."

"There—there, young fellow; don't run yourself down. You'll always find plenty of people ready to take that business off your hands," and Jack Rivers—who was the softest-hearted man imaginable, for all his boisterous ways—brushed away a tear or two, that were beginning to trickle down his rough, weather-beaten cheek, for he could not bear to see one so young, and yet so ready to throw up the game. "You'll soon buck up a bit, with a little good nursing, you'll see if you don't. You were not made for this rough life, you know, and no shame to you, so you need not look so downcast about it. We arn't all made alike, and I daresay you'd cut a very different figure in diplomacy, a matter which if

Jack Rivers ever meddled with, he'd soon burn his fingers, I can tell you. So now cheer up a bit, and tell me what there is to prevent your coming straight back home with me at once. · You see, I heard you were not doing well up here, and we all took a fancy to you when you were with us, so I've come here just on purpose to fetch you away with me, if I can only manage it; but you seem very hard to persuade, and hang it, I never was a good hand at that kind of thing."

Then Percy Gordon held out both his hands, and wrung the elder man's hard, sun-browned hand in his own two, which despite all the work they had had to do in the bush, had lost nothing of their delicate shapeliness, and were all too white even yet for a man who had work to do, if he ever meant to do it.

"It is not because I do not feel the great kindness of your offer that I do not accept it at once, nor is it, God knows, because

there is anything here in the bush to keep me; but, Mr. Rivers, I am penniless, and your daughter is your heiress, as well as very lovely, and I feel I must not go with you. I had rather die here in the bush."

"Bless my soul, is that how the land lies? Well I could not make head or tail of it. Why if Evelyn is my heiress, is that any reason for her not being made happy, like any other girl, with the man she loves best? Oh, she is very lovely, is she? I wonder what you'd think of her pale cheeks now, poor little girl; she has been pining sadly,—but I didn't ought to have told you this; not that it matters now. Oh, she is very lovely, is she? I am as glad now to hear you say this as any man in the colony, though perhaps I could not always have said so; but never mind, she has enough for two, and my little girl shall have her own way, if I can get it for her. But come along now, young fellow, when you're going to do a thing, what is

the use of dilly-dallying? and I am in a hurry to get home again, whatever you are. Oh, she is very lovely, is she! Ha! ha! ha! to think of that being what kept you away. Bless my soul! but I like you all the better for it, that I do," and Jack Rivers went away chuckling, to make the necessary preparations for moving Percy Gordon into Brisbane, and taking him away for good from that bush which he so hated.

Then Percy understood what had brought about that allusion to diplomacy, which had surprised him somewhat on the lips of Jack Rivers, and he saw that it was not only kindly interest in himself that had brought this friend in need to look him up now, and that during his previous stay in Mr. Rivers's house he had done his host that injury, the fear of doing which had made him think he would never go there again, and that Mr. Rivers knew of it, and did not seem to look upon it as an injury at all.

It was very sweet to him, ill, and weak,

and miserable as he was, to think that Evelyn Rivers loved him ; but he soon found himself wondering whether that love had made her very unhappy, or how it could have come to her father's knowledge. It did not turn his head, as perhaps might have been expected, to think that, though penniless and with broken health, he might now any day marry the prettiest girl, and the daughter of one of the richest men in all the colony, and that not only with the good will of her relations, but with them even courting him to do so. Nor was it any thought of Florence Berkeley, that checked his exultation ; no, it was only that he was too crushed to exult in anything any more, this young fellow of whom his friends had never expected any good, and who had tried his best to prove them mistaken, and had failed. It was all very well to marry an heiress after that, but still it was not doing anything for himself, and he had always known, everyone had

always known, that women liked him very much.

So it was a very downcast lover that Jack Rivers brought home at last, after a long, slow journey, to the little daughter, who had been counting the days since he went away ; a lover who was very sweet and gentle, and looked at her very tenderly with those delicate blue eyes, that had never again lost their sorrowful expression, but a lover, who did not rejoice much in his love, though he took to being made love to very kindly. That was at first, after a little it rather bored him. Everyone looked upon him as such a very lucky fellow. Tom and George Vavasor patted him on the back, and paid the lovely Evelyn great, honest, unmistakable compliments, and looked at Percy with almost envious eyes, and all the while he considered himself such a very unlucky fellow.

Why had he always failed, when surely

he had more talents than most other men? And then people would keep on always saying he was not made for roughing it, as if he were some delicate, useless bit of porcelain, and not a man at all. The navy was generally spoken of as a rough school, but there he had done well enough; no one had ever accused him of wanting pluck in those days; had it all gone from him with his uniform? or why was it he had always failed, where other such much worse men succeeded? Then Evelyn was very lovely; hers was an exquisite face to visit a man by his lonely fire in the bush, her silvery voice and light ringing laugh were just made to haunt him for years after he had ceased to hear them, but a man wants a little more than this in his wife; at least, so thought Percy Gordon, after the first month of his courtship and convalescence.

He got tired even of rhapsodizing, with the graceful girl curled up on a foot-stool beside him, her large, dark eyes hanging

upon his, so that she might mark every change of his face, and not lose a word that fell from his lips.

Evelyn Rivers, spoilt beauty that she was, was quite satisfied; to her it was a delicious novelty to have some one else to pet, and in the large, luxurious house, with only her father and mother, the days had often been very wearisome to her; of late, very wearisome indeed, and she had pined and pined away, and drooped and drooped, till at last her secret had oozed out, and then there had been a little very anxious discussion, into the midst of which had come the news of Percy Gordon's sickness, and then Evelyn had grown desperate, till at last Mr. Rivers had ridden away, to see what could be done about gaining his darling daughter's wish for her.

Now she had her beautiful lover to quote poetry to her, and describe beautiful pictures, and dilate upon the glories of the old world, or, indeed, to dilate to her upon

any other subject that came uppermost. She liked listening, and was very good at it, if I may be pardoned such a colloquialism, and Percy Gordon was good at talking, and was fond of it also ; but then he liked to feel that his hearer had something to say on her own account, and this could never be the case with Evelyn Rivers, for she had nothing to say. So the sweets cloyed on Percy after a while, and he grew very weary of it all ; but he was bound in honour to go through with it ; there was no drawing back for him now, so he consoled himself with thinking of the many advantages this marriage would bring him, and promised himself he would be a very kind husband to this beautiful girl, who had so readily given her heart away to him.

Once or twice too now, he thought of writing home ; he had never had good enough news before to make this justifiable in his own opinion. But to whom should

he now write? to Lord Bulmer? of what use would that be? Lord Bulmer had not seemed to distress his mind much about him all this time; he would hear quite soon enough of his marriage when he saw its announcement in the *Times*. Hardly to Florence Berkeley? he could not possibly write to her now, and of course she had long ago forgotten him; it seemed to Percy as if many lifetimes had passed since they two had known and loved each other. In the end, he wrote to no one; he could not write to any of his old naval friends, for what excuse could he give for his long silence, except that he had never done any good yet? and what excuse for now breaking his silence, except that he was falling on his legs again by marrying an heiress? a way in which all his friends had always thought him quite capable of falling on his legs. No, if he had had anything really good to tell them of himself, any real success that he himself had worked out for

himself, he would have written fast enough, he thought; but he could not write now to tell them how he was going to make his fortune by marrying the daughter of one of the richest men in the colony, though she was one of the prettiest girls as well, which of course made it ever so much better, but not yet even sufficiently better, in Percy's way of thinking, to make him wish to communicate the glad tidings to his friends.

The wedding preparations went on, and the settlements were drawn up—just the liberal sort of settlements that everyone would have expected of Jack Rivers—very careful of his daughter, but very generous also to the good-looking, yet penniless young man, whom the spoilt beauty had chosen out for herself from among all the men of her acquaintance. The wedding also was just what people would have expected, a kind of princely affair, at which everyone who was anybody in the colony was expected to attend, and among whom the

bride and bridegroom showed off together to the greatest possible advantage, causing at least a hundred people in the course of the day to pronounce that they looked just made for one another.

When Percy Gordon turned those pensive blue eyes—no ordinary blue, remember, reader, but the blue of the Neapolitan violet—upon Evelyn, as she stood with drooping head at the altar beside him, and bending a little took her tiny hand in his, seeming to clasp it very tenderly and fondly as he did so, there was hardly a girl in the church who did not wish she stood in the bride's place, and as with that thoroughbred intonation, which always seemed like a part of himself, Percy Gordon said, in low, soft tones, "With this ring I thee wed," the envy rose to its greatest height. The men too would have been very envious of Percy, but that for the most part they were men who would not care to be beholden to a wife (Percy would not have

cared for that either, could he have helped himself), and they felt that by their own exertions it would be a long time before they could afford such an expensive luxury, as that lovely, fragile bride, bearing so gracefully her satin and lace draperies, as if such costly, yet perishable garments were her natural covering.

After it was all over, Percy and his bride retired to a far-away country house of Mr. Rivers' for their honeymoon; in those first days it cost Percy a good deal to have no house of his own to which to take his wife. And after the honeymoon they came back to Brisbane for a little, to be with the old people, and then they set sail for England, in the "Sea-Chief," that Percy might show Evelyn the wonders of the Old World, and there regain the health which seemed to be unattainable for him in Queensland, perfect though the Vavasors, and all the old colonists, who had done well there, always voted its climate.

That voyage was the happiest time in all Evelyn Gordon's married life; there were many other passengers, and all cared to talk to Percy, but Percy seemed to care to talk to nobody but her. He was stronger now, and she was suffering at first, and lonely at leaving her home and all the accustomed faces, and he seemed to take delight in returning the kind care she had taken of him during his illness. All on board thought the young couple as devoted as they were beautiful, and made much of them, and fêted them, as such beautiful young things seemed to demand being fêted; till at last they landed in London, on a hot, oppressive August day, all the town looking very dark and gloomy, and the river desolate, in spite of its busy traffic, for a thunderstorm was brooding overhead, and so the world's capital seemed big with fate, as it does at such times, and the fate did not promise to be a happy one. And thus the voyage in the "Sea-Chief"

came to an end, and Percy Gordon, who had gone out from England a ruined man, leaving his debts and a bad name behind him, four years and three months before, had now returned with a beautiful young wife, and with, for the present, more than a competency, and for the future, a pretty certain expectation of great wealth.

Was he not a lucky fellow, and had he not done well for himself? there could be, of course, but one answer to this question.

BOOK II.

THE TIME OF TRIAL.

"First love will with the heart remain,
When all its hopes are by,
As frail rose blossoms still retain
Their fragrance when they die."

CHAPTER I.

"THE MORTAL COLDNESS OF THE SOUL LIKE DEATH ITSELF COMES DOWN."

It was a drizzling, chilly afternoon in June, not promising for a stroll on the Pier, nor for anything else in particular, and a little knot of the men about Ryde had taken refuge in the coffee-room of the Pier Hotel, one of the principal hotels there, as the Pier Hotel mostly is in sea-side watering places, and having taken refuge there, were listlessly smoking, and looking out of the window to see what went by. It was a wretched, dispiriting day—clearly a day abundantly calculated to take all the stiffness out of a crape dress, as well as to do a variety of other things; and yet there

went a crape dress carelessly trailing itself along the length of the long damp Ryde Pier, which still boasts itself to be the longest in England, though no more the longest in Great Britain.

"What in the name of fortune can 'fascinating Fan' be about now? I always thought before that if there was nothing else she cared for, she did at least care for her clothes," said a small, but *bien soigné* naval Commander, puffing away at what must have been a more than ordinarily soothing Havannah, to judge by the smile of serene satisfaction hovering about his rosy face.

"Gone to meet the little sister," said another man tersely, a man tall and dark, and with a reckless, almost devil-may-care air. His cigar was from the same packet as Captain Lorraine's, but no such beatific expression rested on his decided, irregular features, with which the very word *rest* seemed altogether out of character.

"Bolton is always reminding one he knows all the ins and outs of that *ménage*," said Lord Bellamour, a man of whom more hereafter. "But I believe you've paid your price for it, as everyone must who has to do with the Season ticket, though I've never heard your story."

"Season ticket!" said the naval commander, "never heard that name before."

"Engages herself to a new man each season," explained Lord Bellamour; "he provides the little luxuries of the season, and she provides—"

"Not bad at all!" interrupted Captain Lorraine, rather forcing a laugh; "but I think I prefer 'fascinating Fan.'"

"In course you do, my boy. Come, confess, Lorraine, you're smitten with Fanny Berkeley yourself, ain't you, now?" and Lord Bellamour gave the little commander a knowing look, which forced yet more colour into the other's cheeks, and made him move uneasily on his patent-

leather-cased dapper little feet. "I recollect her since—let me see, which year was it?—the year she was engaged to Sir Harry Johnson, or the year—"

"Freddy Anson was the first," said a rather used-up young man, speaking knowingly.

"Quite right, Clifford—you young fellows have such good memories—but then that was at Cowes, and I did not know her till she came to Ryde; but you are right—Freddy Anson was the first, I suppose."

"Not by a long chalk; she'd been engaged to half-a-dozen men at least before that. Got another cigar, Lorraine? that other was not half bad."

"Never knew such a fellow as you, Bolton; you've always the worst story about every one—even beat an old stager like me."

"Not at prosing, I hope," but this was said between his teeth, while getting a light from Captain Lorraine, and Lord Bellamour went on undisturbed—

"Wonder what the little sister will be like!"

"Fanny says we're all to go wild about her," said the used-up young man languidly, "and that not a man will care to speak to *her* after the sister has been here a fortnight."

"And for that reason she is to be supposed to be in such grief for dear Papa, who, by the way, was about the greatest old Turk I ever came across, that she is to be unequal to going out anywhere. All the same, I've seen her years ago, and she'll never come up to what Fanny was," said Major Bolton, all in the same hard, grating tones in which he generally gave vent to his opinions.

"But Miss Berkeley is not quite what she was," said young Clifford, disparagingly.

"No, you young ruffian, though what you know about it, considering you were in long petticoats at the period we speak of,

beats me, I acknowledge. I say, Lorraine, this is precious slow; let's have a rubber before it is time to dress; you're going to Bulmer's too, I know. I've knocked those confounded balls about till I'm pretty near sick of it, I can tell you."

"If you've always the same luck as when I was watching you yesterday, no wonder." This from the young ruffian, but not till Major Bolton had got to a safe distance. He did not look quite the sort of man that anyone would care much about chaffing. "Let us look out of window, and then we'll see what the little Berkeley's like before them, for all their dining at Lady Bulmer's this evening."

The suggestion was adopted, but Florence Berkeley kept her thick crape veil down as she passed the Pier Hotel, and all that could be seen of her was, that she was shorter than her sister, and that her ancles were unimpeachable.

"Florence, my dear child, you really

must appear this evening. I can't hear of your stopping up stairs. It's all nonsense about your being so tired with your journey, and then Fanny has been going about so much, it won't look well, if you shut yourself up."

"Only Fanny likes gaiety, and I don't. Can't we both do what we like, Cousin Mary?" Florence had taken off her bonnet and cloak, and was gazing out of the window, when Lady Bulmer came into her room; she now drew her head back, and turned round, revealing a quiet calm face, that almost made one feel restless to look at, it was so very quiet.

"Nonsense, child, don't like gaiety! it is too absurd. Besides, how can you know without having tried, and I don't believe you've ever yet been to a ball."

"No; balls have not come in my way."

"Or rather you've not gone in their way; but you must come down to-night. You know how superstitious I am, and we

shall be thirteen if you don't, so you really must."

"Yes, if you wish it," and Florence looked and spoke so much as if it was perfectly indifferent to her, that Lady Bulmer felt as if she had been rather needlessly expending her powers of persuasion.

"It will cheer you up, I'm sure. You see now you have been nursing your poor papa so long, that no wonder it makes you feel low, and not quite inclined for anything of the kind. Fanny says it would have made her just the same if she had stayed with him. He was a great sufferer, and it must have been very painful. I think it was really a mercy when he died."

"No—no; I can never think that," and Florence's face changed in that startling manner in which only generally quiet faces can change, making one ever after feel as if they were but slumbering volcanoes, which might be woken into action again at any time.

Lady Bulmer was fluttered. "Well, not quite that, perhaps; no, of course not —very natural you should not think so— oh yes, of course. Well, my dear, you will come down then; and shall I send Thérèse to help you? What shall you wear? have you got anything?"

"I can only wear what I have got of course," and a chilly little smile—which seemed in no way to belong to it—flitted across Florence's face, and then finding no resting-place there flitted away again. "But don't be anxious about my appearance; I shall do very well."

"Oh, that is just like a girl, who knows nothing about it, and all the importance of a first appearance. But what will you wear in your hair? I've got some lovely crimson roses in the drawing-room, and natural flowers are just the thing for mourning; shall I send them up to you?"

"Thank you, but I should not like to wear them."

"Well, have some of my diamonds then, or pearls, or something. I'd rather you would not appear at all, than that you were a dowdy, indeed I would," and such was Lady Bulmer's anxiety, that the tears nearly came into her eyes.

"You are very kind, Cousin Mary. If you have quite a small diamond star, I should like to wear that very well, but indeed I look best with nothing in my hair, and I'll promise not to be a dowdy."

Then Lady Bulmer fetched a diamond star, feeling as if her generous offer had not been very graciously accepted. "Really those Berkeleys have such an inordinate opinion of their own beauty!" she murmured to herself as she went back to her room, "and I do want this one to take; Fanny is beginning to pall upon people now."

Florence had declined any offer of assistance in her toilette, and she now set to work very conscientiously to keep her pro-

mise, and make herself look as well as she could. She had hated the idea of coming to stay with the Bulmers, lingering on abroad after her father's death, first on the pretext that the change to English climate would be too trying during the winter, then that the friends she liked best to come home with were going by way of Switzerland, and she thought she might as well accompany them, but at last the evil day could be no longer delayed. Lord Bulmer was her guardian, and his house, —which had already been Fanny's home for the last year and a-half—was the natural home for Florence too now, at all events till she came of age—a time which as she now and then thankfully reflected was not very far hence. She had never forgotten that it was Lord Bulmer's doing that Percy Gordon had gone to Australia, at the same time forgetting that, but for his going there, Percy might —as Fanny tersely expressed it—"be rotting in an

English prison to this very day." She had no opinion of Lord Bulmer's judgment, and she thought that he might have advised Percy better; anyhow he might at least have taken the trouble, after having sent him out there, to hear from him from time to time, and this trouble Lord Bulmer had not taken.

He was the sort of good-natured steady-going man, with no particular business of his own, who was always having young people committed to his guardianship, and as long as his wards were well-looking, and well-mannered, Lord Bulmer was very well pleased, and quite ready to put himself even a good deal out of his own way to get the poor young things any pleasure, but if the poor young things got into any real grief, or promised in any way to go to the dogs, like Percy Gordon, Lord Bulmer at once considered himself released from their guardianship from that very moment, and troubled his head no more about them.

In Percy Gordon's case he was the more to be excused, because the young man was no longer a minor when he went to Australia ; yet considering that Lord Bulmer had been his sole guardian ever since Percy was ten years old, and that he had treated him just as he would have treated his own son, as he often said, it was perhaps a little strange that he had never taken any trouble to hear anything of him since the day Percy Gordon sailed for Brisbane—four years before.

Florence thought it very strange, and disliked Lord Bulmer accordingly, though he had originally been the link between her and Percy, being her uncle as well as his ; Percy not being otherwise connected with the Berkeleys, though, from his being treated by Lord Bulmer as we have said before like his own son, Colonel Berkeley had readily adopted him as a nephew of his own.

In spite of her dislike to her uncle, Flo-

rence could not but think it very kind of her aunt, who, being not so very much older than Fanny, had stipulated from the very first time she took her to stay with her at Cowes, that she should be always addressed as "cousin Mary" — Florence could not, I say, but think it very kind of cousin Mary to take so much interest in her appearance, which she supposed must be her way of showing a kindly feeling for herself, so she determined to do her best to please her, and taking her time about her toilette, not to hurry over the finishing touches, on which—as she knew from long practice in artists' studios—the whole effect so often depends. Thus she was not quite ready when the guests began to arrive, and Fanny, who was the secret cause of Lady Bulmer's appearance in Florence's room with her little fib about the thirteen, for the party had been originally intended to consist but of twelve, and the two extra people had been only invited at the last

moment to furnish this pretext, hurried into her sister's room all anxiety as to how she would look. Her own toilette had been a very laborious affair, or she would have been there before, and she repented her delay all the more when her eye fell on Florence's very simple square-cut black silk, with severe crape trimming,—a great contrast to her own low dress, a real *chef d'œuvre* of net bouillons.

"My dear child, you're hardly——"

"Now I think I look very well, Fanny; quite as well as I ever shall, so please don't put me out of conceit with my appearance, I have taken so much trouble about it," and Florence, having at last finished the last of her finishing touches, rose from the glass, and turned to survey her sister. "Oh, but you certainly do look more dressed," she exclaimed, seeming rather discouraged.

"My dear Florence, you are simply perfect," and Fanny advanced and kissed her,

being perfectly satisfied with the view she now had of her. "Don't talk about my dress! I could have stood yours once myself, I believe, but not now, alas! What would I not give for your complexion?"

"Why, yours is much more brilliant," and Florence looked admiringly at the elder sister, who had all her life appeared to her the very incarnation of a ball-room belle, and now quite as much as at any time.

"Horrid child! when yours is like nothing in the world but alabaster, only a great deal more beautiful than any alabaster I have ever seen. Why, Florence, you are a *great* deal more beautiful than I ever thought you would be."

"Am I! I am so glad," and a gleam of the old fresh childish happiness shone out of Florence's eyes, and Fanny knew she was thinking of Percy Gordon, and sighed impatiently as she led the way into the drawing-room; but the happy light had

not quite died out of Florence's eyes as she followed her into the room, happily quite unconscious of the curiosity with which her coming was expected.

"Never thought little Florrie would grow up like that," muttered Major Bolton. "Where the devil did she get that expression from?"

Lord Bulmer advanced immediately to do the honours to his new ward, and he did them all the better, because she was the most beautiful woman, as well as the greatest stranger there. That was the puzzle of it, anyone could have understood Florence Berkeley's growing up into a pretty girl,—possibly a very pretty girl,—but *that* she certainly was not, no one could possibly have called her so. She was a beautiful woman, and yet all the old faults in her face remained the same: her nose was still too small, her chin too firm and massive; but who could notice such defects as these, while her complexion was so start-

ling in its purity ? only the more so, set as it was now against a background of thick coils of dead brown hair,—always dead brown ; none of the pretty red or gold tints in it, so popular at the present day, but still beautiful in its way : beautiful—as everything about Florence Berkeley was grown beautiful now. The eyes were still the old, deep, decided blue, but there was a mysterious stillness about them now, even more charming than the old dewy freshness had been ; a stillness, which, as I have said before, made the beholder feel anything but still. It was their expression, which was even yet her chief beauty, but strangely enough that expression was quite different, and not what anyone in the old days would ever have thought her eyes could have attained to.

"Introduce me, my dear fellow," said Sir Henry Digby, nudging Lord Bulmer as he spoke.

Sir Henry was a married man, often "on

leave," as he termed it. He was on leave now at Ryde, and in a few minutes he had succeeded in routing all Lady Bulmer's well-conceived little plans for the arrangement of her dinner-party, and was himself conducting this new alabaster beauty into the dining-room.

"You have only just arrived; have you travelled far to-day?" he asked, as soon as they were comfortably seated.

"From Paris; almost too much for one day. I so dislike long journeys."

"Every one must. But you were last winter at Rome, were you not?" said he, with that easy off-hand manner, which made people accuse Sir Henry of getting over more ground in a fortnight than other people accomplished in a lifetime; and then Sir Henry, being somewhat of a connoisseur in beauty of all kinds, and a well-read man to boot, they plunged into a regular art discussion, which lasted them till well on in the dinner. Florence was interested,

and she looked so, and Sir Henry was feeling very proud of having infused so much animation into a face that had at first sight promised to be only that of a beautiful statue, when all on a sudden he felt that he no longer had got her attention, and being a man of the world, and seeing the case hopeless, stopped short in the very interesting anecdote he was telling her, and pricked up his ears to find out, if he could, what had all at once turned his fair listener into stone again. She was looking a little way down the opposite side of the table, and his eyes following the direction of hers rested upon a broad-shouldered man, with rather a bushy beard, who, in answer apparently to a question of Lord Bulmer's, was saying :—

"No, I did not stay long in Brisbane ; I was in a hurry to get home, but curiously enough I saw the very prettiest wedding there, that I've ever seen in London, Paris, or anywhere."

"Really!" politely remarked Lord Bulmer, while Fanny, who was seated next to the broad-shouldered man, asked with the prettiest assumption of gravity possible:

"Do you go in for being a judge of weddings, Mr. Boville?" She looked very grave as she asked the question, but there was a wicked little glance out of the corner of her eye at Major Bolton, which showed she was not quite so innocent as she chose just then to appear.

"Not exactly," replied Mr. Boville, rather put out, though he did not quite know why, and therefore inclined to reassert himself; "but I think this wedding that I was speaking of the very prettiest wedding there could possibly be anywhere. I'd back it with long odds against any other wedding, if one could find any competent judge anywhere, and I'd back the bride too for being the prettiest girl I've ever seen anywhere."

"The bear!" muttered Major Bolton to Fanny, who, looking sweetly penitent, mur-

mured, "I deserved it," then turned again to Mr. Boville.

"But may not we know the name of this lovely creature, who unfortunately did not meet with you *quite* soon enough?"

"She has not met with me yet; I only saw her," growled Mr. Boville, while a titter went round the table, for most people were listening by this time, and those, who were not, yet laughed from polite sympathy with those who knew the joke. "Her name was Evelyn Rivers, and it is now Evelyn Gordon, I suppose."

"Evelyn Gordon," exclaimed Fanny with a little start, the colour dying suddenly out of her cheek.

"Oh yes, did not you see it, Fanny, in the paper the other day?" said Lord Bulmer. "I meant to have told you. Percy Gordon seems to have fallen upon his legs at last; it sounded like a good match. Is the girl rich, do you know, Boville?"

Fanny had grown pale; but not even

she, who knew her so well, could see any perceptible difference in Florence. Yet now Florence rose up from her chair—

"I am tired," she said in soft low weary tones. "I should like to go and lie down."

"My dear!" cried Lady Bulmer, hurrying to her assistance.

"Take my arm," exclaimed Sir Henry. "These scents! some eau-de-cologne!"

But Florence would have nothing, seemed only to wish to get away from them all. She was told to go to the drawing-room and rest, and her own room was so little like her own room as yet, that she was as willing to go there as anywhere. All she wanted was to be left alone, but when every one had left her, she remained no longer on the soft low couch, where they had thought she might rest most comfortably, for she could not lie down. She rushed into the verandah, and there half on her knees, half crouching, she clung to the railing, whilst violent tearless sobs convulsed her whole frame. Then

it was wonderful to see what perfect control she had acquired over herself; she heard the rustle of silk dresses in the room behind her, and the next moment she was standing up, leaning on the railing, still in a dreamy attitude, it is true, but to all outward seeming calmly contemplating the lovely sea view.

Many enquiries were made as to how she now felt, and to all of them Florence answered very simply, that she was better, while the other ladies went on with a dropping fire of: "So hot the evening was!" and "The journey so tiring!" "I always get the noise of the train into my ears, don't you?" "Long dinner parties are so tiring!" Only Fanny suggested, "Had not you better go and lie down upstairs, little Flo?" and little Flo answered more petulantly than Fanny had ever heard her speak before, that she did not wish to lie down.

Afterwards the gentlemen came in, and Captain Lorraine having managed an introduction sat down by Florence.

"I have been so pleased at some news I have heard to-night of an old messmate," he began. "He was always very junior to me, but we were in the same mess for three years, and there was no one half so popular in it as Percy Gordon. It is not often I have been so sorry as when I heard he had left the service and gone to Australia, and now it seems he has married an heiress and a beauty out there. He is a cousin of yours, is he not?"

"A sort of cousin." Florence Berkeley was stone again now.

"Her father is said to be the richest man in Queensland."

Florence smiled. Why she should smile she did not know, but something seemed to be expected of her, so she smiled.

Captain Lorraine tried several other subjects, but all equally in vain. "Yes," and "No," and a smile were all he could extract from this new beauty, and yet he could not forget that he had seen her but now talking,

really talking, to Sir Henry Digby. Sir Henry rested on the laurels he had already gained, and was too wise to risk a defeat; he kept clear of Florence for the rest of the evening, only as he said good night to her, he pressed her hand a trifle longer than the laws of etiquette demanded, and Florence was woken from her apathy for a moment, and looked up surprised. But she had thought him a nice friendly man, and so she smiled on him a tired but yet a friendly smile, and every one thought Sir Henry had made a conquest, and Sir Henry thought so himself.

CHAPTER II.

"I DAUR NA THINK ON JAMIE, FOR THAT WAD BE A SIN."

It was long before Florence again looked so beautiful, as she had looked that first night at Ryde. The beautiful stillness had departed from her, the look of waiting for something that would surely happen some day, though it took a long time about it, a very long time the sorrowful eyes would seem to say; that had all gone from her. The face was a quiet face still; it did not change its expression often, that is to say, but then its expression was like that of a beautiful wild creature, driven to bay and hopeless. People talked about her.

Ryde was not at all full yet, nor the season properly begun, (the Bulmers had only come down so early, because with Fanny Berkeley in such deep mourning, and themselves in mourning also, they could not properly enjoy the London gaieties, and therefore preferred avoiding them altogether), but even before the season there are quite enough people in Ryde to talk, and so they talked of Florence Berkeley now; they talked of her ancles, they talked of her complexion, they talked of her figure, which was graceful and rounded, and all that a woman's figure ought to be, except perhaps that it wanted height—yes, it would have looked better still, if there had been just a few inches more of it—and also they talked of her expression.

"There's another of those good-looking Berkeleys," said Mrs. Clifford. She was young Clifford's mother, but not nearly so used up as her son yet, though she had lived a few years longer. "What a pity it

is that they are such horrid fast girls, one can have nothing to do with them."

"Do you think they are *both* horrid?" said pretty Mrs. Northwey; she was still honey-mooning with a perfect brute of a husband, who, as every one thought, must have used magic to win for himself such a dear little pet of a wife.

"Look at that youngest one's hard reckless expression; oh yes, she'll be just as bad as her sister before long. Besides, what else could Fanny Berkeley's sister be but horrid? and just look at the way she goes on flirting all day long with that foolish Sir Henry, a married man, too! it is really disgraceful, and he has got grown up daughters of his own. I can't think how he can go on in such a way."

"I daresay she thinks she is quite safe with him, as he is married, and Sir Henry is very agreeable."

"Oh, yes; he is very agreeable, and a man no one can help liking, he is so good-

natured, but all the same I should not like to see one of my daughters talking to him the whole day long in the way Florence Berkeley does. No, you're too good-natured, my dear Mrs. Northwey, but you'll see how it will all turn out."

"Oh, I hope not—at least I hope I shan't see anything bad, for I've quite taken to that girl's face. I'm sure I should like her very much, if I only knew her, she has such a sweet sad face. I don't think it reckless at all, and I feel as if we were fated to be friends."

But then as Mrs. Northwey had chosen Captain Northwey for a husband, Mrs. Clifford did not feel bound to think much of her opinion.

The truth was, Fanny Berkeley had won a reputation for herself, and not for herself only, but for all those belonging to her, most especially of all for her sister, and Florence Berkeley was now suffering from this. Women fought shy of her, and men—

well, men were rather free in their manners, which, considering she was Colonel Berkeley's daughter, and Fanny Berkeley's sister, was not very surprising. So Florence took refuge more and more with Sir Henry, whom she considered a nice friendly man, and who had ten times better taste and far more conversation than all the young men whom Lady Bulmer and Fanny were for ever introducing to her, and who in a general way first disgusted her by their forwardness, and then astonished her by their ignorance. Sir Henry was rather too much given to squeezing her hand, whenever he said how-do-you-do, or good-bye, and to putting his arm protectingly round her whenever there was any possible excuse for it, and such excuses will occur sometimes, if people look out for them, even in the best regulated societies, and he had a way of walking up to her, and taking possession of her, as if she in some way belonged to him, which Florence could not

help resenting at times; but otherwise he was not forward, indeed particularly respectful in his manners, and he certainly was not ignorant. Then a married man has always a great advantage over unmarried men. Sir Henry could say to Florence Berkeley: "I think there is nothing more beautiful than a look of perfect exhaustion on a woman's face. I shall never forget *that* night—when I first met you, and you were so tired you had to leave the dining-room, you remember. Oh, that recollection will haunt me to my dying day," and Florence knew not only that it was all nonsense, which she might have known equally in the case of an unmarried man, and that it was Sir Henry's little way, but she knew also that she need not dread anything further of the kind, and he having said this or something in like fashion could glide away to another subject, without suggesting the unpleasant idea that something within him had given him warning:

"Hold hard there, my good fellow, or you'll be in for an offer."

This sort of thing is all very well; it does not do the married men much harm, and the young ladies may perhaps equally truly flatter themselves, that it does not do them much harm either; but it can hardly fail in a measure to blunt the edge of their delicacy, and it certainly does make the tame compliments, which discreet unmarried men venture on, seem very tame afterwards. It was so with Florence, she found the young men stupider and stupider each day, and she paid less and less regard to what they said to her. It was in vain that poor little well-dressed Captain Lorraine proved fickle to "fascinating Fan," and "sighed and looked, sighed and looked, sighed and looked, and sighed again," for her little sister. Florence either could not or would not take any notice of his wooing; till at last he offered, and she refused him at once, just as if she had never given him any en-

couragement, nor seen the little man dying by inches for her sake day by day. The story of his offer and its refusal got about somehow, and that did Florence Berkeley no good either ; indeed, nothing that she could do was likely to do her much good in the eyes of the Ryde world. Lady Bulmer was Lady Bulmer, and therefore people all liked to know her more or less, but they considered her very fast, and were not likely to think well of any young girl whom she took about. Then Fanny, whom she had now chaperoned off and on for many years, was considered by many people worse than fast, and so they were prepared to think very badly of her sister, and then, when she arrived, and people saw that she was yet more beautiful than Fanny, and all the men were ready to go wild with admiration of her, it was natural, though of course wrong, that a little envy should make it easier to the women to believe that she was of just the same sort as her sister, and

being quieter was probably deeper and wickeder at bottom.

There were strange tales told too of the society she had associated with abroad, and though exaggerated of course, these tales had a certain foundation of truth. Colonel Berkeley had been the last man to look after a young daughter, he had also been the last man for good steady going people to care to have to do with, and so the bad people had come about his house more and more, and Florence's very ignorance of evil had prevented her guarding against this, though at the same time it had prevented her suffering from the contact, as she would otherwise have done. And yet her character had been affected by it to a certain extent, or rather her views of life had been affected. She had preserved all the old good principles, that were partly perhaps natural to her, partly learnt from her mother, and from Cyril Thornton, but she had grown accustomed to be with people,

who acted on no such principles, had never heard of them, and could not have entered into them, if they had. She had also lost all the help that a fixed code of proprieties gives a girl brought up in one settled home. English proprieties at home and abroad are very different, and Italian proprieties are different again from either, and so are German proprieties, and it would be difficult to know anything laxer than the code of proprieties of Germans in Italy, or of Italians eschewing the society of their own countrymen.

Besides the set, with whom Colonel Berkeley by preference associated, was not only made up of people all holding different codes, but all systematically, or rather unsystematically, acting contrary to their own codes. This sort of society must always be bad for a young girl just forming her views of life, and though, when she came to Ryde, Florence was still as simple-minded and right principled as when she was a child,

yet in all her actions she had to go to first principles to guide her, and had no help from any knowledge of conventional etiquette, so useful a standard to refer to in all the little conventional difficulties that are for ever arising in every day life, and in which little difficulties first principles are rather unmanageable. By their help alone it is often very difficult indeed to see that one course of conduct is at all more right than another, though all the time the well brought up world with one glance of its Argus eye sees an immense distinction between the propriety of the two courses.

Thus Florence Berkeley, though she was a better girl at heart than one in a thousand that we meet with, did once and again unwittingly offend against the conventional proprieties, when she first came to Ryde, and being with people who were known to offend against them intentionally whenever they had a chance of doing so unpunished,

and it suited their purposes, her little unconscious peccadilloes were naturally not given the benefit of a doubt, and women cared less and less to have anything to do with the Berkeleys, and when they heard of Captain Lorraine's offer to the youngest, thought him a lucky man to be refused, at the same time thinking all the worse of her for having refused him.

This had all come about very quickly, and it was still quite early in August, when as Florence was sitting alone one morning in Lady Bulmer's great drawing-room, a card was given her, and following close upon his card Mr. Thornton was announced. She greeted him almost warmly, for he reminded her of the old days, those old days which are so very dear to each one of us, perhaps in part because they never can come back again. But directly after the first welcome, she saw the change in his appearance, and knew that he was now a Romish priest. Well, it was only like everything else.

She had believed in him all her young days, now she could only think of him as a weak and vacillating man, who had taken the most solemn of vows without due consideration, and had repented afterwards — certainly very much against his own interest.

Mr. Thornton was much embarrassed in the first interview after their long separation ; he had not forgotten the matter of their last talk, and with this still fresh in his mind could hardly say much about the "one true faith," outside of which is no salvation, or pour forth any of that passionate eloquence, which caused him to be daily considered more dangerous among those who wished still to hold to the good old faith of their fathers, nor cared to take up with those new-fangled notions Rome passes off for antiquities under the colour of its great name as a connoisseur in such matters. He had always been an enthusiastic man, and being now for the moment convinced himself, was ardent to bring all others into the

fold, which he himself had gained at last through such great vexation of spirit. The old love for Florence Berkeley made him only the more anxious to guide her to this haven, and this made it so much the more distressing to him to be unable to enter upon the subject at all, till the recollection of their last conversation had been at least somewhat wiped out by more recent ones. This was all an additional embarrassment, besides that natural embarrassment incidental to every man, who after the lapse of only a few years sees the one girl he has ever loved, for the first time after he has been refused by her.

It was a relief when the others dropped in one by one, but even then the conversation flagged, yet Mr. Thornton stayed on and on, as if unable to tear himself away, until at last Lady Bulmer murmured an invitation to luncheon. It was not very cordially given, and it seemed to remind Mr. Thornton how the time was passing,

for he got up hurriedly now, only pausing for an instant, as he said good-bye to Florence, to ask, "May I come again?"

"Do," was all she said, but if she had spoken volumes, she could not have expressed better, that she would be glad to see him, than by that little monosyllable, and Mr. Thornton went away, thinking that she was more beautiful than ever, and quite as charming, and he thought also, he had never before quite appreciated all the sacrifice he had made in becoming a Romish priest.

"She does not look happy. I wonder if she would have taken me now," he caught himself thinking, and then he recognised the enormity of his thought, and the rest of that day was spent in the pretty little church of St. Mary, and before he came out of its religious darkness into the matter of fact world outside, he had vowed a solemn vow to himself, that in atonement for his momentary wish he would spare neither

pain nor trouble to bring Florence Berkeley to a knowledge of the true faith. It might be dangerous for himself, but for her it could only be gain, and what was he worth if he could not face the danger?

To say that Florence Berkeley hated her present life is not enough, and yet there is hardly a stronger word in the English language. Her life had been a very sorrowful one ever since her mother's death; ever since that time she had been in close attendance nursing her father, whose health and temper had both appeared daily to get worse. They had gone from one foreign place to another as long as Colonel Berkeley was able to move about; at last as he had grown too weak for that, they had stopped in Rome. Before they went there, Fanny had left them; those southern places did not suit her health, she said, and she never found herself of any use. It was curious that too, for she was stronger for nursing than Florence, and of old she had always

been Colonel Berkeley's favourite daughter; but whilst she sauntered up and down some fashionable promenade with the last friends of the hour, Florence was learning all the invalid's crotchety irritable ways, and then when Fanny with her off-hand good nature would come rushing in to see if she could do anything, she naturally disarranged matters, and found herself *de trop*. So having received many pressing invitations, she at last packed herself off, and went to take up her abode with Lady Bulmer.

Florence stayed with her father, forced herself to be civil to his friends, or rather acquaintances—he was not exactly the sort of man to have friends—and read, and painted, and sang, and was scolded from morning to night, till she learnt what it was that had given her mother her sweet patient expression, and herself nearly followed that gentle mother to the grave, but lived on for Percy Gordon's sake. At last the time came, when she had to be a daily and

hourly witness to all the horrors of a lingering death without religion, and accompanied by excruciating bodily pain.

If Colonel Berkeley had lived a hundred years longer, I do not think his death-bed would have been a materially different one, but it was natural that Florence did not quite think this, Florence, who had nearly prayed her heart out for him during all those nights and days of agony. She supposed it was all right; of course it must be all right, but still she could not help thinking that, if her father's death had been delayed a little longer, those prayers might have been granted. She thought she had seen a promise of a change, perhaps God had seen it too, and then it was indeed all right. Oh, of course it was all right! but still she could never call it a mercy that her father was spared further suffering. It might be all very well for herself that he had died when he did; if he had lived on much longer it would probably have killed

her—perhaps, though, that would have been best for her really—but for him she could never think it a mercy—never—never, and all the thanksgiving in the burial service seemed to her a terrible mockery, and she only felt glad that she was so completely worn out as to render it impossible for her to go to hear it read over his remains, as they were returned to the dust from which they came.

After the funeral she had the calmest brightest time she had known for many a long day, first slowly regaining her strength, and then admiring the wild beautiful Swiss scenery with friends, who, if they were not quite congenial, at least were very kind good people, and very tender to her. At that time too she had the sweet thought of Percy Gordon to dwell upon, she could freely love him then, and think again and again over every trifling word he had spoken in the old happy days, over every careless look. The thought of him had been

sweet to her even in her hardest times; now it was taken from her; now he was the husband of another, a girl who was very beautiful as well as very rich. Oh! it was probably a marriage of inclination quite as much as of necessity. He was married, and she must not think of him again; he was faithless, and she would not.

During her hardest times she had yet always had a feeling, that she was doing her duty, which had helped to keep her up; now she did not see what duty she was fulfilling. She thought of going into a sisterhood, just as Fanny had always foreseen she would, and if she could have done so, she would have made a very useful sister, and been happier in that way, she thought, than she now could ever be in any other, but she knew that Lord Bulmer would never hear of anything of the kind, and that no sisterhood would receive her, under age as she was, without her guardian's consent, so she stayed with the Bulmers at

Ryde, and hated her life, and fancied it was impossible to hate it more.

"Fanny and Florence, here is news for you, my dears, I am sure you will be pleased at this," said Lord Bulmer one morning at breakfast, his mouth full of buttered toast, and his hands full of letters. "Here are Percy Gordon and his pretty bride just arrived in town, and anxious to see old friends — finding it very hot too — the little Australian already beginning to droop. We'll have them down here, that we will; you'll be glad to see your old friend, won't you, my dears?"

"If there is one person in the world I hate and despise more than another, it is *that* Percy Gordon," said Fanny, with emphasis.

"Heigh-day! I had no idea of this, and you, Florence—shall you not be glad to see your old play fellow?"

"Oh, of course. People are always glad

to see—those they have known before, are not they ?"

If Mrs. Clifford had seen her then, I think she might have been pardoned for calling Florence's expression hard and reckless.

"Yes, to be sure; yes, to be sure," and Lord Bulmer went on to his other letters, "so we'll have them down here, that we will. As to all Miss Fanny's intense hatred of him, I never heard anything of it before, and I don't much believe in it now. He was always a nice taking lad, though he did go a little wrong, but he was always a taking lad, especially with ladies !"

"I thought you went in for being good," said Fanny severely, as soon as the sisters were alone together. "I can't say I understand you good people; for my part I like to speak the truth, and you know you'd willingly walk to London barefoot to avoid seeing Percy Gordon, and that horrid girl he has married."

"Rather I would walk to London barefoot in order to see them," said Florence, gloomily.

Fanny was startled. "Do you mean to love him through everything then? that might do very well for me, but I should hardly have thought you would have considered it proper. And Florence, I would not, if I were you; he was flirting with that horrid Mrs. Brown here, before he ever went away; he was never true to you."

"You are always talking of that Mrs. Brown. I should like to see her; I should like to know her."

"Well, but you never will go down the pier. Come with us this afternoon, and I'll introduce you, if that is your little game. Now I think of it, Flo, I don't see why we shouldn't spoil her sport, as well as she ours."

"What! win her husband from her? but she does not seem to care much about him according to you."

"No, not whilst he cares for her; but if he took to somebody else, it might be different. However, of course her weak point is her lover. As you are the most aggrieved, I think you ought to take him in hand, and I'll undertake Captain Brown. Freddy Anson was not much of a loss, though I did mean him to pine for me a little longer, but a lesser pain might make up for him. Well, that's settled then, and we'll begin this afternoon." And running to the piano, Fanny sat down and played a brilliant bravura with even more than the required amount of pedal.

Florence meanwhile hung about the verandah, and brooded over her thoughts. She did not know what Fanny had been talking about to her; she had not really heard one word she had said; she only knew that Percy Gordon and his bride might appear before her in a day or two, and she could not feel like a Christian towards them; she did not know that she could even greet

them with that amount of composure required of a lady. All the bad that there was in her was uppermost just then ; it was the turning point in her life. Yes, the time had come now, at which, as Fanny had said long ago, "it was a toss up whether Florence would go into a sisterhood, or become even faster than her sister Fanny."

The people of Ryde had some excuse for their harsh judgment, for there is a bad side to every character, and Florence's bad side had been coming more and more to the surface ever since she had first heard of Percy Gordon's marriage.

She went down the pier that afternoon with Lady Bulmer and her sister, and though Florence had entirely forgotten their morning's conversation, indeed had never heard it, Fanny recollected so much of it as to introduce her to Mrs. Brown, and Florence saw a little woman with an innocent pussy-like face, and a *very* large fair chignon. Captain Brown, a big good-natured sandy-

haired man, was sitting beside her as usual, and to this fact Mrs. Brown owed it, that she was still visited, but as Captain Brown was stone deaf of one ear, and this ear his little wife always contrived should be the one turned towards her, his being there did not make much difference in reality. On the other side of Mrs. Brown sat the man whom Fanny had spoken of as her lover, and who was not visited, that is to say nobody asked him to their houses, and particular people did not even bow to him, but, as we all know, Fanny was not at all particular.

"What a good place you've got, Lord Bellamour, you always manage to be just the right distance from the band."

"Delighted to give you up my seat, Miss Berkeley—but you'll introduce me to your sister, that I may find another seat for her," and the wicked old nobleman ogled the fair Fanny, as it is the way of wicked old noblemen to ogle pretty girls.

The scheme of the morning recurred to Fanny's mind. "Florence, let me introduce Lord Bellamour, who wants to give you up his seat. As for me, I must go to cousin Mary, who I see looking despairingly about for us," and giving Lord Bellamour a look to imply she was a match for him any day, though she did not mind complying with his wishes for this once, she hastened away to Lady Bulmer. The scheme of the morning might do capitally for Florence, Fanny thought, but, as for herself, she had other fish to fry, and could not afford to waste time just then in winning Captain Brown's affections, which might just as well be won any other day.

Florence was rather taken aback by Fanny's desertion, but to walk across the pier by herself on a crowded band day was not exactly what she felt inclined to do, and Mrs. Brown looked very sweet and pretty, so Florence sank down into the now vacant seat beside her, and Lord Bellamour

stood before them, and made conversation with them both. He was quite contented so to stand; though in general much devoted to his own comforts, an introduction to the younger Miss Berkeley was, as he felt, better luck than he had looked for in his old age. Fanny, handsome and showy though she was, he had known for a long time, and cared nothing for, but Florence, who looked simple and innocent, had just that kind of beauty which the wicked earl in reality most admired. As they sat side by side he saw that the startling purity of her complexion made Mrs. Brown's appear almost coarse by comparison, and then he, who had watched her so admiringly the few times she had come to the pier before, could not but recollect how much he had been struck by her silence and indifference of manner, and could not but be flattered, immensely flattered to see that she talked and laughed with him. Florence would have talked and laughed with any one that after-

noon, for she felt as if she were going mad, and knowing neither what she said nor what was said to her, was all unconscious of the many glances of pious horror directed towards her; still the tone of the conversation was distasteful to her, and after a little she felt as if she must go to Lady Bulmer, who, though fast and silly enough in all conscience, still was different somehow.

"Let me escort you," said Lord Bellamour, "so fair a creature can never thread the mazes of the pier unprotected." So Florence went with Lord Bellamour to find Lady Bulmer, and the pier being very crowded, and Florence not much accustomed to the sort of thing, they took some time finding her, for though Lord Bellamour soon discovered her with his wicked old eyes, he was in no ways inclined to curtail the search. Thus a great may people saw Florence Berkeley walking tête-à-tête with Lord Bellamour, just as a great many peo-

ple had seen her talking and laughing with him before while sitting by Mrs. Brown.

"Those two Berkeleys ought to be cut," said Mrs. Clifford, "the youngest is far worse than the eldest, she is a deep underhand flirt, and I will say one thing for Miss Berkeley. Whatever she does, she does quite above board. However I give them up henceforward, and I beg, my dears," said she, turning to her daughters, "that you will take care never to be seen talking to either of them."

"What a pity it is that somebody does not tell that nice-looking Miss Berkeley that she ought not to have anything to do with that dreadful old Lord Bellamour!" said pretty Mrs. Northwey to her husband.

"Suppose you do," said he, with a guffaw, to Major Bolton, "you always seem precious intimate with the Berkeleys."

"Always let a girl go to the devil her own way," replied the other in his harsh

tones, emitting volumes of smoke as he spoke. "Besides, the youngest one is not my affair. Better speak to Sir Henry about her, if you want any one to interfere."

"But Sir Henry is not here, he is away yachting, and somebody ought to do something. I am sure she does not know how horrid he is," said Mrs. Northwey, plaintively.

"Suppose you tell her yourself," and Major Bolton smiled grimly; "but if I were you I'd think twice before I meddled with the Berkeley lot. You're pretty sure to burn your fingers if you do," and he sauntered away.

"They must be very fast for even Major Bolton to speak of them in that way, and he knows them so well too," said Mrs. Northwey to her brute of a husband.

"Of course they are; not the least respectable, and I won't have you mixing yourself up with any such people. I'm not going to be talked of like that fool Brown,

though I have the misfortune to have a pretty goose for my wife, as Bolton seems to have found out," replied the brute.

After which no wonder Mrs. Northwey's eyes looked prettier and more pathetic than usual for the rest of the afternoon.

That was the beginning of a new order of things. Florence Berkeley went on the Pier and flirted, or to speak more correctly, let herself be flirted with by any one who succeeded in routing the other competitors for her favour, and that any one was often Sir Henry, and sometimes Lord Bellamour. Sir Henry himself was the first person to tell her that this should not be so, and the first time he spoke to her about it, she put it down to jealousy; but he told her so again, and more earnestly, and then she believed him.

"Fanny," she asked her sister after that second warning of Sir Henry's, "why did you introduce Lord Bellamour to me?"

"Did I?" said Fanny, "I really don't know. I was not thinking, I suppose."

"Then you knew he was generally cut?"

"Oh, yes, I knew it. But the dear world is so very particular, I never feel bound to be guided by it in my opinions, and of course I could not know you would take to him as you have done."

"Fanny, I never did—I never liked him at all," and a burning flush passed over Florence's cheeks and brow, "but I could not know what sort of man he was, and you ought to have told me, or rather you ought never to have introduced him. You ought not to speak to him yourself."

"Well, I've never talked to him half so much as you have in the whole course of my acquaintance with him, though it is of many years standing," answered Fanny, nothing daunted.

Florence looked very hopeless. "I don't know how I can cut him all at once, and I cannot talk to him any more—I cannot.

I will never go near the Pier again, and then I hope I may escape seeing him."

"Won't that look rather queer?—the Gordons are coming to-day, you know. Oh, did not cousin Mary tell you? Well, they are, and we settled to go and meet them this afternoon—you'd better come too. It will look better, or are you not equal to it? I thought you were so very proud, no man ever was to break your heart." Fanny was put out, or, careless though she was of what she said, she would not have spoken in this way; now even she was frightened to see how desperate Florence looked. "Don't kill me, child!" she exclaimed, and ran away, leaving her sister to conquer or be conquered by the wild passion her thoughtless words had thus excited.

Florence went to the Pier that afternoon, and she walked up and down, and talked and laughed—there was a wonderful change in her since she came to Ryde—but her courage was failing her, and in the end

when there was a proposal that some of the party should go out in a boat, she was only too glad to be of the number. Fanny and Lord Bulmer remained upon the Pier to welcome the Gordons, and reported afterwards that she was perfectly lovely, and he was ever so much improved.

"He seems very tender of her too," said Fanny; "much tenderer than I should have fancied cousin Percy could ever be of any one but himself. I suppose he *is* fond of her. He begged to be remembered to you, Florence; he had no idea that we were either of us here, or of anything that has happened to us; seemed, indeed, quite behindhand about everything—so very different to what he used to be."

"Yes, so very quiet now, and he used to be rather a noisy boy," said Lord Bulmer. "Dear, dear, I was always very fond of him, and I wish they would have dined with us to-night, but he was very positive in declining. How surprised he seemed

too to find you were both here! I thought I mentioned it when I wrote, but I believe I did not give your name, only said old friends. She is very pretty, is she not, Fanny?—quite a dangerous rival for you and Florence. By-the-way, what have you been doing, you two? Mrs. Clifford quite drew herself up, and looked as if she would not hear of it when I wanted her daughters to join the boating party this afternoon."

"Mrs. Clifford is very rude," said Fanny.

"Ah, but it is not only Mrs. Clifford. You are always walking about with a lot of men now, never any ladies, and I can't say I like it—not at all, Fanny. Mary, you must look better after these girls, or you will all get more talked about than is at all desirable." Poor unconscious Lord Bulmer!

"If Florence will walk about with such a man as Lord Bellamour," began Lady Bulmer.

"Florence walk with Lord Bellamour!

How could you permit such a thing, Mary? How could you do so, Florence? I see how it is, everything always does go wrong unless I am by to look after things myself. I have been yachting too much lately, that's where it is. But I never should have thought—dear! dear! I am very sorry indeed!"

"Now, Florence, you see you need not hold up the world's opinion to me any more," said Fanny the next day. "You walk once or twice with Lord Bellamour on the Pier, with no more idea that he is not the dearest, best old man in the world, than a mouse would have, and you get cut. There is no use shirking the truth any longer, I've seen it clearly enough the last few days, though uncle Henry is so blind, and cousin Mary don't care. Now what do you think of your dear world any longer?"

"I think its opinion ought to be respected, and I think you are the last person

who ought to reproach me, Fanny, since it is all owing to you that I'm cut, which may be the case for all I know. I daresay you are right, you are older, and of course know better than I do."

"Don't always be throwing my age in my teeth in that way," said Fanny coolly. "It was different a few years ago, but now it is no advantage at all. And it is very fine saying, it is all owing to me, when I am not cut. No, I am not, Florence, not as you are, so you need not shake your head, and a mighty clever world it must be if it does not see that I am the one, who ought to be cut, and you are the one who ought not. I don't see that its opinion ought to be respected, not I, and I don't mean to, that's flat."

"Mr. Thornton," announced a servant at this moment, and "Oh! I can't stand that man," exclaimed Fanny and vanished, leaving her little sister to entertain him alone.

The Bulmers' was a very lax house, where such *tête-à-tête* visits were of daily occurrence, the only drawback to them being, that no one could tell when they might be interrupted by the dropping in of somebody else.

Mr. Thornton had seen Florence once or twice since their original meeting at Ryde, and they had gradually fallen back rather into their old style of conversation, discussing some of the last new books, and some books that were anything but new; still their conversation had always hitherto been superficial, each carefully avoiding touching upon any subject that could be personally interesting to the other. This day, however, it was impossible that it should continue to be so. Mr. Thornton found Florence visibly agitated, and as she, not being well up in the sensation literature of the day, did not follow the grand moral of at least half last year's novels, and sit down with her back to the light, where she might

observe the expression of her visitor, herself unseen, he could not fail to remark one or two large tears rolling slowly down her generally colourless, but now flushed cheek. Mr. Thornton had been her lover, but he had also known her from a child, and he *could* recollect the time, when Florence had cried herself to sleep in his arms after the death of a pet dormouse, so it was not quite so difficult for him as it would have been for most men to take notice of her apparent grief now, and attempt to comfort her; and as all the explanation of her sorrow, that Florence would give, was that her life was unsatisfactory to her, and that she was perfectly miserable, the conversation very soon became a religious one.

Then Cyril Thornton spoke long and earnestly of the comfort to be found in the bosom of the "one true Church," and touched, though at first very shyly, on the rest he himself had found there, and Flo-

rence listened, and thought him very eloquent, and could not but be touched by his earnestness and kindness. When a young girl, chiefly self-educated, talks to a man nearly twice her age, who has had all the best educational advantages England can offer, and by no means made the least of them, and who is besides very desperately anxious to convince her, certainly all the chances are in favour of his persuading her of anything that he wishes her to believe, and Roman Catholic doctrines hardly need all these odds in their favour to seem very alluring to a girl brimming over with the spirit of self-sacrifice, and wholly dissatisfied with her present life.

Before Mr. Thornton left her, Florence had promised to go to St. Mary's some day soon—to hear the music, of course. That is always the inducement first held out to the possible convert; and when he left her she felt so giddy and confused, that more because she thought it would soothe her than

anything else, she thought she would go there at once. There was no service going on when she entered the little church, so close and hot, yet pretty, with light and air both equally religiously excluded; it was only open for meditation, and this did soothe her very much, and the wish which she had already felt more than once or twice during her wanderings abroad to join the Church of Rome came over her stronger than ever. The giving up of her own will to the care of another, which it inculcates, seemed to her then as I saw it well described the other day, the extreme of self-indulgence; yet she did not realise that it was self-indulgence, though what could be greater to many minds?

Florence had often gone to Roman Catholic churches abroad, and felt no shame at doing so, but here in Ryde, where she was known, and where all the people in the church were probably English, she had somehow felt ashamed of

being seen coming out of St. Mary's; so she had put on the old thick crape veil, that had so baffled the curiosity of the loungers at the Pier Hotel on the day of her arrival, and she supposed it was owing to this, that as, having reached the meeting of High Street, the principal street of former days, with Union Street, its more ambitious descendant, she was about to pass by the little theatre, and so go home, Percy Gordon, who was walking in the contrary direction, and thus met her *en face*, did not recognise her. She knew him, of course, even at a little distance off, but somehow she could not make up her mind to call upon him to recognise her, only she took this opportunity, when he did not see her, of looking at him well. He was changed, certainly, he was no longer a stripling, but a man now—otherwise well formed, but still with shoulders too broad for his height; his expression was no longer the bright hopeful one it used to be, he looked tired,

dissatisfied, hardly discontented, but certainly anything but happy. His head drooped languidly now, whereas of old he had always carried it well thrown back on his shoulders, and as Florence passed by him, she could not help feeling her heart filled with an unutterable pity for this man, who had thrown aside as worthless all the wealth of love she had lavished upon him. He had chosen for himself to do without it, but he did not seem to have done well for himself by his choice; proud though she was, and Florence was proud, she forgave him at once for his want of faith of the past, she forgave him at once for his want of recognition now, when she saw how very little of happiness there was in his face and bearing, and though she had passed him by, she repented, and thought she would speak to him.

"Percy," she said, "Percy, do you mean to cut me?" Directly she had said the words she was sorry, for it recurred to her,

what she had rather forgotten again, how Fanny had said everyone was cutting her, and she wished she had used any other word but that.

"I—I beg your pardon," and Percy was raising his hat, and shaking hands with her, all with an air of such perfect politeness, as made it impossible to believe he had been anywhere beyond the precincts of May Fair since their last parting, four years before. Perhaps there is nothing in all the world so chilling as perfect politeness, when it comes in lieu of cordial friendliness. Percy stood looking down at Florence with those *yeux doux*, which are so dangerous in man or woman, and Florence saw nothing for a mist of tears, and he saw nothing, for he was looking at her, and her veil was impenetrable, and neither of them had a word to say to the other.

It was an embarrassing situation, and not much improved by the fact that Percy had taken hold of Florence's hand, and had

as yet forgotten to release it. "I never knew you were here," he said at last.

"Did not you?" said Florence, and then again they were at a standstill, but by this time he had let go of her hand. It was her turn to make an attempt now. "I hope your—Mrs. Gordon—is better," she faltered out.

"Thanks, yes. She is with Lady Bulmer now, I believe, she hoped to make your acquaintance also. I—I had a headache, so I have come out for a solitary walk to try and get rid of it," and Percy smiled a sweet sad smile, that seemed like a watery reflection of the old smiles, that had been wont to course one another in quick succession over his beautiful features, making her heart bound joyously.

"Poor Percy," she said, just as she had been used to say it in the old days, when he had made her the confidante of his boyish sorrows, then, as if recollecting herself, she went on more constrainedly: "I

will hurry home then, for fear I should miss her. I am told she is very lovely," and Florence smiled a pathetic little smile, that was lost behind her veil.

"Many people think her so, I believe," said Percy, leaving it doubtful, whether he did not think so himself, or only considered it bad taste to praise his own wife, and then they parted, for there was nothing more that they could say to each other now. And Florence did not hurry home at all, but walked very slowly, thinking to herself that Percy Gordon must have dreaded this first interview almost as much as she had, and thinking too that he could not care much for his young bride, lovely or not, or surely he would never smile so sadly, and she felt very sorry for Percy, and the hard bitterness was already beginning to melt away from her heart.

Evelyn Gordon was still at Lady Bulmer's when Florence got home, and Florence greeted her with almost as chilling a polite-

ness as Percy had treated her to, wondering very much as she did so, that he should look so sad, when his young Australian bride was so lovely and graceful, and had such pretty winning ways. When Evelyn went home she told her husband that she was charmed with Lady Bulmer, and Fanny too, "she is so straightforward, and so handsome, but as to Florence, she is just a stupid piece of propriety, what one reads of in books as a regular English country girl, I should say," and Percy set this speech down as only another proof of his wife's own stupidity, and did not attempt to convince her of the contrary, but just gave one of his sorrowful smiles, and went to dress for dinner. They were to dine at the Bulmers' that night. As Evelyn was evidently quite well, and could not be supposed to be too tired any longer, he had no pretext for refusing Lord Bulmer's very pressing invitation, and now, that the first interview with Florence was over, Percy himself no longer cared so much

to refuse. As for Evelyn, she was positively dying to see a little of that English society of which she had heard so much, and dying also to show off her fresh bridal finery, and beautiful young husband, before an admiring multitude.

CHAPTER III.

"WHY WILT THOU EVER THUS BEFORE ME STAND, THOU GHOSTLY PAST?"

"OH, you can't possibly go, Florence. I never heard of illness yet, where there was not infection, and besides, it is quite preposterous. How Mr. Thornton can ask it of you, I can't understand." So spoke Lady Bulmer, beginning to disrobe, preparatory to dressing for dinner.

"Dear Cousin Mary, I wish you would not object," replied Florence, with the tears in her large blue eyes. "I know I am a good nurse, if I am good for nothing else, and this poor unfortunate lady is all but out of her mind, and she has no relations

here, nor any one that understands her. Mr. Thornton says he would never have sent for me but that it is such a dreadful case, and he knew of no one else, and—and it is all very well for you to say she has no claim upon me," she went on hurriedly, as she saw Lady Bulmer trying to interrupt her, "but I should really like to go. I should like it better than anything else. Now, Cousin Mary, do please consent. You know Uncle Henry will, if you will."

"Really, Florence, you are the most extraordinary girl. How can it be possible for you to like going to nurse a mad woman? you know it can't be. I never heard of any one doing anything of the kind, unless it was some one belonging to them, except of course in the lives of the saints, and though you look like a saint—but here is Henry, so you can ask him; I know he won't hear of it."

"Uncle Henry, Mr. Thornton has just come to ask me to go to nurse an unfortu-

nate Mrs. Cholmondeley, who is nearly out of her mind with grief at her husband's death. She was very ill before, and now they are afraid she will die, and she seems to be very poor, and has no relations or friends here."

"But, my dear Florence, you're not at all called upon, and you're much too young and pretty, my dear, to go out as a sick-nurse just yet. Besides, Mrs. Cholmondeley is probably a Papist, as Mr. Thornton is interested in her, and I can't bear Papists."

Florence stood quite still, with her hands clasped, and her deep blue eyes fixed on Lord Bulmer's face, as if she did not consider he had given her any answer as yet. Standing thus, she looked like the most beautiful picture, or rather the most beautiful statue imaginable. Lord Bulmer thought this, and he had never known how to refuse a beautiful woman's request yet, but then, this was not the sort of request

beautiful women were in the habit of making to him. He hesitated.

"You can't possibly wish to go. I understand that you think it right, and that sort of thing, but you see they probably want you at once, and there is this party this evening, and the Gordons coming, and all. I don't see how we can spare you."

"I don't think I shall be much missed," said Florence, gravely, "and I do wish to go. I am accustomed to nursing, and I should so like to do something useful. Please do not thwart me, Uncle Henry."

"My dear, it is the last thing I wish to do; but sitting up at night will really not be good for you. You have had too much of that kind of thing already, poor child, and we must be careful of this lovely complexion for you, if you will not consider it yourself. Besides, there are sure to be Popish priests coming in and out."

"Come and speak to Mr. Thornton about it," said Florence, in the old quiet

manner that had been wont to exercise so much power over her irritable father, and Lord Bulmer suffered himself to be led away, and after about half an hour spent in making conditions, gave way, and consented that Florence might now do as she liked about it, if she would promise to comply with his injunctions.

So Florence went to nurse Mrs. Cholmondeley, greatly to Fanny's horror, as well as to the amazement of Lady Bulmer, who had felt quite sure her husband would never consent, and now made one final stipulation on her own account, that Florence was not to come backwards and forwards while nursing, for "where there is illness there always must be infection."

"Looks odd, does not it, the youngest sister not appearing? and not a woman in the place will speak to her now, not if she knows it," said Captain Northwey, after the ladies had left the dining-room, addressing his next neighbour at the dinner-table, who

as it happened, was Percy Gordon. "Oh, you're just come, but you'll soon know all about it, if you are going to stop in the place. It is Lord Bellamour, that has done it, Lord Bellamour and Sir Henry Digby between them, but the Berkeleys have always been a fishy lot."

"They are cousins of mine," said Percy, with an assumption of dignity that sat well on his beautiful features, and as he turned immediately to some one else, the conversation dropped there; nevertheless it had made its impression. It was not till quite late in the evening that Percy asked of Lady Bulmer, "Where is Florence to-night?"

"Oh, she is gone to nurse a poor sick lady, who seems to have neither friends nor money, and is dying, and half out of her mind. It is the maddest idea I ever heard of; as for me, I would go a long way out of my way to avoid such scenes, but Florence is so queer, she seems quite to like them.

You see she looks like the pictures of the saints, and I suppose she feels like them. It is just what one reads of in their lives, is it not, giving up everything at a moment's notice, and going off to nurse a perfect stranger ?"

"Rather a wild idea, certainly," and Percy recollected how he had always considered Florence inclined to be high-flown and romantic in her pursuit of what she deemed right. "But do you know anything of this lady ?"

"No, nothing, absolutely nothing," began Lady Bulmer, but Lord Bulmer here interrupted.

"Oh yes, my dear Mary, I do. I made all manner of enquiries of course, before I let Florence go, though really Florence is such a little saint, it would not do her much harm to go anywhere."

This last remark was rather lost upon Percy ; he only noticed the upturned eyes of Captain Northwey, and went and sat

down again by pretty Mrs. Northwey, to whom he had been principally devoting himself during that evening.

Whilst away in Australia Percy Gordon had put Florence Berkeley so much out of his mind, as to be really unconscious of doing her any wrong, when he married Evelyn Rivers, but arrived in England again, surrounded by all the old accessories, and constantly meeting the friends of former days, the recollection of her and of his promise to be true to her for ever had come back very forcibly to him, and when he heard it was only a chance that he had not seen her the first moment of landing at Ryde, he began to shrink greatly from meeting her again. The sweet girl cousin, the only person he had ever really loved, though, what with one time and another, he had had many *affaires de cœur*, how would she greet him? had she kept true to him for all these years? had she forgotten him? what could she think of his marriage?

Percy went backwards and forwards over the same ground, and could arrive at no conclusion, but he knew that he would have done a good deal to avoid seeing her, and would gladly have left Ryde instanter, could he have thought of any possible pretext for doing so. Then he had met her—without being able to see her, it is true—but he had heard her voice, and the last parting between them, years before, came back to his mind more vividly than ever, and he knew now that he had acted very badly towards her. There was no use in disguising the fact, he had acted towards her in a manner in which he himself would be the first to despise any other man for acting. The feeling of self-reproach was no new one to him now, but it can never be a pleasant feeling, and Percy was very willing to shift the blame on to some one else's shoulders. That some one else was of course, in this case, Evelyn, who had been the unconscious cause of his throwing over

Florence; why had she fallen in love with him, leaving him no choice but to marry her? Poor, ill, and miserable, it would have been but natural if he had jumped at this last chance, but he had not jumped at it—he had waited till it was ready to fall into his mouth, and only then he had availed himself of it, and saved himself. He forgot that he had been faithless to Florence years before he had married Evelyn, faithless to her almost from the moment when he had parted from her, that he had not thought of her as his future wife, even once after he had landed in Australia, that he had had no hope nor faith in her, or himself, or anything. He forgot all this now. To him it seemed to have been all Evelyn's fault, he was not to be blamed.

Still was there not something in Florence herself to justify his want of constancy? It would be a comfort to him to think so, though like every one else in similar cases, Percy Gordon would have indignantly

denied this. Yet it was a comfort to him now to find that other people thought there was that in her to justify any man in want of faith to her. At first he did not believe it, simply did not believe it, and thought it was wonderful that even the ill-natured world should be so preposterously ill-natured as to speak any evil of her, but by degrees he grew to think there must be something in it, till at last it became positively pleasing to him to hear her lightly spoken of. That last freak of hers, as he considered it, was offensive to him, he hardly knew why; perhaps it was only as any display of self-sacrifice is odious to the ingrained selfishness, becoming more and more the characteristic of our countrymen, and one of Percy's greatest faults. It was offensive to most of the *goody* people of Ryde, they looked upon it as poaching upon their preserves. What business had a girl still beautiful and young, and notorious as being in one of Ryde's fastest sets, to en-

croach upon their department of being "ministering angels?" and they retorted upon her, and said she did it for effect, and evidently cared for nothing but making a sensation, without heeding what pains she had to take so that she accomplished this object. If the *goody* people said this, the naughty people said worse, for their proverbial good nature is only extended to people of their own set, and Florence Berkeley never had properly belonged to their set, so they had no fellow feeling for her, and Percy Gordon soon ceased to say she was his cousin, and listened apparently unmoved to their comments, but not really so.

By degrees a new feeling sprang up; he believed Florence to be now a vain unprincipled girl, more regardless of the proprieties even than Fanny, and at the same time he remembered what she had been, he could not forget that, and a sort of sorrow came over him, that she too should have so little

fulfilled her early promise, together with a great terror of having all his illusions dispelled once and for ever, by seeing her in this new phase, and a determination to avoid her persistently. And here a fresh cause for anger against Evelyn arose, for, however unreasonably, the deterioration in Florence was now laid to her door also. Poor pretty Evelyn! he had never loved her. If Jack Rivers had never gone up the bush to look after him, Percy, haunted as he was by the memory of her graceful beauty, might have worked himself up into fancying that he loved her, and died believing it; but as she had surrendered the fortress of her heart to him, before he had ever made up his mind to attack it, so that as it had seemed to him at the time there was only one course open to him as a man of honour, or even of common sense; as she had done this, Evelyn had become to him an object not worth the possessing. She had brought him good things, but in Percy's

eyes she herself was by no means one of these good things.

At first he made believe to care for her, and aired all his prettiest looks and manners for her benefit, but by degrees this became more and more monotonous to him, and when he arrived in civilised society, and found fresh people more to his taste and much more difficult to win, (half the pleasure of conquest is in the conquering, a truth never too often repeated), Percy began to reserve his best manners for them, and to treat Evelyn only to the indifferent ones. And even if his love had ever been hers, which it never had been really, Evelyn was still the most unlikely person in the world to win it back again.

That first dinner-party at the Bulmers' she came home from with an aching pain at her heart, such as she had never felt there before ; she had succeeded in exhibiting her finery, but she had not succeeded in exhibiting the young husband, she was so much

prouder of. He had never come near her once all the evening, and had spent most part of it talking to Mrs. Northwey, who, though she could by no means be called the prettiest person in a room where Fanny Berkeley and Evelyn herself were also present, was still quite sufficiently pretty to justify any wife in an attack of jealousy. But Evelyn swallowed her jealousy, and tried to look as if she did not taste its bitterness. If she had been a little fury, and overwhelmed Percy with reproaches the first moment she was able to speak to him alone, or if she had banged out of the room, and refused to speak to him for a day or two, he would have taken care to behave better for the future, if only for dear peace's sake. If she had used any of those pretty flirting wiles, which 'fascinating Fan' could have taught her by the score, Percy might have been quite taken with her—it was just within the verge of possibility—and thought on the whole that she was plea-

santer than Mrs. Northwey, who after all was very silly. Unfortunately Evelyn, though not silly, was stupid ; she adopted none of these plans, for she was too stupid even to think of them, so she only hung about Percy more lovingly than ever, now that she had at last got him to herself, and wanted to make cigarettes for him to smoke before going to bed. But Percy preferred smoking a cigar, and above all he wanted to be left alone to think over things a little, so he refused the cigarettes, and telling her she would catch cold hanging about in her evening dress, finally peremptorily ordered her off to bed. Yet even then, Evelyn hung about him a little longer, and showered kisses on him, which he took very patiently that evening, but rather as if they were a bore than otherwise. And as she loved him, she saw this, and went to bed very miserable, and cried herself to sleep, because she was not clever enough herself to be able to interest her beautiful, clever

husband, whilst Percy sat up late, and smoked and thought, but certainly not about Mrs. Northwey, though he had talked to her all the evening.

That was Evelyn's way of winning back the husband, who had never really been hers. She never reproached him, and she loved him more than ever, and was very miserable because she saw now, stupid though she was, that he did not love her. And yet he tried to be kind to her; he took her to the Pier, and having attached her to the Bulmer party, would see her surrounded by a knot of men, and then think he showed his trust in her by leaving her, safe of course now to be amused, and would go himself to amuse somebody else, often Mrs. Northwey, sometimes Mrs. Brown, anybody in fact, who came convenient, but certainly more often than other people Mrs. Northwey.

Mrs. Brown was pretty still, but she was too disreputable for him now; he had de-

voted himself to her in the old days, but then he was Quixotic, and thought the world was shunning her unfairly, now he was grown older and wiser and given to thinking that where there was much smoke of evil report there was also in all probability some fire of evildoing. Besides, the tone of her set was very distasteful to him now. Mrs. Northwey, on the other hand, was *simpatica* to him, she understood everything he said, almost before he said it, and she was so bright and quick in jumping at conclusions, often wrong of course, but then so amusingly wrong. She had a husband too, who clearly did not treat her well; how such things get about, it is impossible to know, but it was pretty well known that though only bride and bridegroom he did ill treat her, and though no longer a Quixote, Percy had a good deal of chivalry in his nature. So he took the rôle of comforter to pretty Mrs. Northwey, a dangerous rôle at any time, and persuaded

himself he only did so to pass away the time, and leave his wife free to enjoy the society of other men ; and nobody interfered with him. Evelyn did not tell him that she could enjoy nothing, and nobody, without him, and that no man could be agreeable to her, if he were not beside her to find him agreeable also. And Captain Northwey did not interfere, he did not care for his wife's society himself, and Percy Gordon with his money (his wife's money it was), and his lovely young wife herself, was very different to that rather questionable character, Major Bolton, whom no one could ever believe to be after any good, and who had the worst tongue of any man in the place.

Percy Gordon on the other hand was such *good form*, that Captain Northwey rather liked than otherwise seeing him standing sentry over his wife, thinking she must be safe with a man of such irreproachable exterior, and thus Major Bolton often now found his accustomed seat by Mrs. North-

wey occupied, so often indeed that he got out of the habit of it altogether, and took to lounging on the railings by himself, and morosely watching what went on around him.

The young ladies on the pier had nearly given up wondering why Major Bolton never went to talk to them, for he never did. Of his spoken opinion of women the less said the better, he admired married women for the cunning, which they must have employed, to reduce any man into being fool enough to lead them to the altar, and so paid them the compliment of talking to them occasionally, but to young ladies he never talked, except to Fanny Berkeley, and she was a young lady *per se*. He had taken to Mrs. Northwey in some unaccountable fashion, but directly he found the favourite was going in for her, he gave up the running at once. It might be he did not care for the prize sufficiently, or it might be "sour grapes," for of course every

one must see that he had no chance whatever of competing against Percy Gordon. Was it "Miss Pink's" original idea that the characteristics of *the* object were "such sad eyes and such good gloves?" whether or no, Major Bolton did not possess these characteristics, and Percy Gordon did. He had not only sad eyes, but a sorrowful smile, which is yet more effective, and as to his gloves, they were perfect, so was his hat, so were his boots, so was every part of his get up.

"First rate form, quite A. 1!" said young Clifford admiringly, and wondered how he managed it, and what there was so distinguished in Percy's black velveteen coat, that made it so entirely different to every one else's, young Clifford's own among the number.

But as yet no one talked any scandal about Percy Gordon and Mrs. Northwey. However silly she might be, he looked too much the correct thing to be making love to

any other man's wife under his own wife's very eyes. People had talked about her and Major Bolton, before they had been half so much together, a fresh example of the old adage: "One man may steal a horse, whilst another may not even look over the hedge."

CHAPTER IV.

"HER HEART IT IS ANOTHER'S ; SHE NEVER CAN BE MINE."

FLORENCE obeyed Lady Bulmer's injunction, and did not go backwards and forwards between the two houses, but remained constant to the office she had undertaken in Mrs. Cholmondeley's house, only going out for short walks, which now generally ended in St. Mary's, and depending for her news of the outer world on Fanny, who was very liberal in imparting it, and went up to see after her most days for a few minutes at least. For the rest of the day Fanny flirted as usual, and lately it had become evident that there was

one man she flirted with in preference to anyone else. She no longer sat surrounded by half a dozen admirers, but walked up and down with one man, and always the same man; a tall fair man, with long pulled down whiskers, who did not talk much apparently, and seemed as if up to this time he must have positively lived upon parade, always holding his nose in the air, and fixing with his eye an imaginary company ahead, with which he strove hard to keep in line, no easy matter on Ryde Pier.

This man was the same Mr. O'Neile, who travelled down with Fanny to St. James's Cray, just after her engagement with Frederick Anson had come to an end, and who had not seen anything of her since then, till one day he found himself quartered at Sandown, and in her very neighbourhood. It was easier to meet her now than in the old days of *casual* meetings by gates in rural lanes, and so his six feet three

of height were often to be seen over at Ryde now, and Fanny liked the tall, fair Irishman; she had always liked him, and now, besides the object she had in view beyond him, and through his means, he was a great relief to her. For though a flirt born (was he not an Irishman?) he did not talk much, and she was tired to death of all the many pretty speeches other men whispered into her ear, and which she knew by heart quite as well as they did, and could have repeated yet more correctly sometimes, had she ever had the opportunity to make them useful. Then so many men had glanced killing glances at her, that she had grown very callous to them, and hardly felt them any longer, so that there was not much pleasure in them.

Of course "Paddy" O'Neile, having eyes in his head, did glance killing glances at her, but he did not do his flirting by means of this, any more than by spoken words; no, his kind of flirtation

was essentially a flirtation by touch. If he was waltzing with a young lady, he would give her a gentle pressure at first setting off, and again before he released her, so gentle, indeed, that she would be truly prudish, were she to object to it, but still just sufficient to suggest to her the idea that possibly he did—well—like her rather, and after the waltz was over, and he had taken her to walk in the passage, and Paddy always did take his partners to walk in the passage, he would press the little arm that was resting upon his, press it just once or twice, with a look of perfect unconsciousness on his blonde handsome face, leaving the owner of the arm in a state of delightful uncertainty, as to whether she was inexpressibly dear to him, or whether it was a little trick of his practised upon every girl with whom he danced during the course of the evening.

This made a flirtation with "Paddy" O'Neile the lightest, easiest sort of amuse-

ment possible; it was a real rest after other more difficult affairs, not making the very smallest tax upon the intellect, and Fanny Berkeley revelled in it. It was a flirtation quite after her own heart. She liked him too, he was so simple and honest with such fresh naïf Irish ideas, and then he was so devoted to herself, ready to die for her any day, or, what is far more to the purpose in these times, to fetch and carry for her like a great big dog, and Fanny let him fetch and carry for her, and this big dog of hers, six foot three in his stockings, with a heart to match, and not an ounce of brains to his name (he had passed through Woolwich, but it was as by a special miracle, and Woolwich in his days was not what it is now) fetched and carried for her, and was perfectly happy.

Thus the flirtation progressed, and one of those beautiful moonlight evenings, on which the world of Ryde generally finds itself assembled on the Pier after dinner,

just as it has been assembled there before dinner, also just as it had been assembled there before luncheon, Fanny and her faithful admirer found themselves sitting alone together on the pier, having ingeniously distanced the rest of their party and —well, this was a flirtation by touch remember; not a high kind of flirtation certainly, indeed, much the same as that which Martha and her policeman indulge in, when they spend their afternoon together in the Regent's Park on her Sunday out, but still such is the kind of flirtation a good many young ladies of the present day indulge in by preference, and such was this one, and it had been going on some time, so Paddy was holding one of Fanny's pretty, small hands clasped in his own two big ones, whilst they both sat silent listening to the gentle plashing of the water, dark now, for the moon was behind a cloud.

"I can't think what Miss Berkeley sees

in that lanky fair man," said Mrs. Clifford austerely, "but I suppose we shall hear of her being engaged to him next. What people mean by calling it 'being engaged,' I can't imagine, the men don't mean anything by it, neither does she."

"That is the way you ladies talk. Men are different; sometimes they are very much in earnest," said Major Bolton in the harsh grating tones, which never varied with the varying emotions of the man.

"Do you think that Maypole is? no, not he; nor she either," added she indignantly.

"Possibly not, but still I should say he was very much in earnest, very much so indeed, poor fool," and Major Bolton pulled his long moustache meditatively.

"Oh, I believe men are all infatuated with those Berkeleys; for my part I can't see anything in them, not anything at all, and I should like to cut the whole lot, only one does not know how to cut people who

give such good dinners as the Bulmers, and Lady Bulmer after all is not half so bad as the two girls. Very silly certainly, but if she only knew how they went on, she'd—now look there, it really is disgraceful."

The moon had come from behind its cloud, and Fanny and Mr. O'Neile were still watching the waves, now grown silvery again, in blissful ignorance that other people were in like manner watching them. Major Bolton passed his arm through young Clifford's, and sauntered off in their direction.

"Let us investigate further," he said, "this sort of light is very deceptive."

"A stunning moon though!" said young Clifford languidly; he never listened to his mother, who was quite too much for him, and had as yet noticed nothing amiss.

"This clear moonlight makes everything distinctly visible," said Major Bolton, of course in answer to his companion's last

remark, but speaking in that very audible voice that some people seem to think required when they are unable to see each other as by day, but which Major Bolton did not generally make use of in his evening saunterings on the Pier. They were just passing by the fair Fanny as he spoke, and when they next sauntered by, the interesting *tête-à-tête* bore quite an altered appearance.

"Major Bolton, come and talk to me; you have not spoken to me for an age," said fascinating Fan.

"It must have made a great impression on me then, for the recollection is so fresh in my memory, I could have sworn it was but a minute ago."

"Don't be absurd. And you are smoking such a good cigar too. I like somebody to smoke for me."

"You have plenty of people to do that for you," said he, perfectly unmoved.

"Oh no, I have not. Mr. O'Neile does

not smoke, and I like your cigars better than any one's," she added, as poor Paddy was beginning a protest. Miss Berkeley was very fond of saying Mr. O'Neile does not do this, or this, till sometimes the great lanky fellow feared she must think him somewhat muffish, and after all he was as fond of a quiet weed as any one.

"I've nothing to talk about though, and you seem to want talk as well as smoke."

"Tell me what you are thinking of then. What do you think about as you walk up and down in this clear moonlight?" said she, mimicking the tone in which he had spoken when he had last walked by her.

"The moonlight makes me sentimental. The clearer it is the more sentimental does it make me, and I think of old times."

"As if men ever did such a thing!"

"I'll tell you a story I was thinking of just then, if you are bent upon hearing something, about a man who thought of old times, and had plenty to think about."

He had moved now, and was leaning against the railing behind her, standing on the other side to that on which Mr. O'Neile was sitting, now in the shadow of the fair Fanny, as she turned to listen to Major Bolton's story.

"Oh, a story from you will be a great novelty. Pray begin."

"The man was rather young when my story begins; never mind, it is a fault that soon mends. He was in love with a girl rather younger than himself, very good-looking too, like you."

"Thank you; but you will never get on if you stop to pay compliments by the way. I know what a time they generally take you."

"Well, he was not only engaged to her, which does not seem to count for much now-a-days, but he loved her—really loved her—just cared for nothing else in life, and nobody. One day his regiment was ordered to India—I should have told you he was in

the army. Oh, of course a brother officer! or I should not know so much about him, and since he knew he could not marry her just then, and found he could not exchange except at a ruinous loss—he tried everything, he determined to sell out in order to remain near her, had actually sent in his papers to the colonel, when—he had not heard from the girl for a fortnight, let me tell you, and was already getting unhappy about it, but what need to say that now! The news came, and quickly enough got told to him, how she was engaged to a rich young nobleman—had thrown him over, in short, and without a word."

"So he got back his papers, went to India, and consoled himself. Oh, very sensible, of course," said Fanny, with a short laugh.

"I don't know about that last. He went to India, and when he was half dead with jungle fever, he heard it was all a mistake about the young nobleman—all a

mistake!" he repeated, as if he had rather lost the thread of his story, and was trying to recover it, "so he thought life was worth living again, and picked up a bit, and got sent home on sick leave. He was too ill to knock about England at first, so he went straight home, and he had hardly been there a month, and was just beginning to get about again, when he heard the girl was engaged—really engaged this time—he took care to make sure about it now. Well, he had some more months of leave, but he did not care about them then; he started for India in the next steamer, and turned up before any one looked for him. His brother officers all thought him mad, but by degrees they changed their minds, or at all events decided it was a harmless madness, and learnt to look upon it as rather a convenience than otherwise, for he never wanted any more leave. It was eight years after that before he came to England again. When he did see old England once

more, don't you think that man must have thought of old times as he walked up and down in the moonlight? Don't you think he must have had a good deal to think about?"

"Yes, if he thought over all the times he had made a fool of himself. Listen, and I'll tell you a story in return for yours. There was a young girl, very young, who was engaged to a man she loved—much in the same way your man loved your girl—and he went away from her; he was obliged to go, and she heard how all his people were moving heaven and earth to break off his engagement, and she turned proud — she was proud then, though she loved him so much, but very young girls are always more or less proud, and she would not write to him; and one day she heard how he had gone to India, gone without one attempt to see her again, without one line to say good-bye. It nearly drove her mad; I don't myself think she was ever quite sane after that,—

never the same again certainly, but she believed in him still, she could not help believing in him, and she thought it might be a promise to his people, and a case of waiting for a year or two, so she waited for him. She waited till he came home again, and she waited for some time after that, but he never came near her, so she engaged herself just out of pique, and for the name of the thing, to the first man that came to hand, and then she heard how he had gone back to India again, and there being no need for it any longer, she broke off her engagement at once, for she hated the man it was to, if only because he was not *the* man, and from that engagement she floundered on into another, and so on, and so on, but always loving the first man just as much as she ever had, always."

"Is that a true story, Fanny?"

"True!" she exclaimed impatiently, "true! can't you believe me, when I am speaking to you even? Well, which do

you think had most to think about, your man or my girl?"

"I will go and consider of it," said Major Bolton, with a glance at the Irishman, who, unable to make out what they were talking about in the low familiar tones of intimacy, was yet becoming impatient at being so long shut out of the conversation, and so saying Major Bolton carried off himself and his cigar.

"What earthly right—" began the hot-headed, fair-faced artilleryman.

"Has Major Bolton to call me by my name?" interrupted Fanny. "Oh, he used to know me long ago—when I was a child, you know, and he called me so then."

"But he has no right now, he is a horrid——"

"Oh yes, a horrid man, is he not? Not what anybody would ever call a *nice* man, no, certainly not. But I never heard him so tiresome before, with long stories about Heaven only knows what," and Fanny

looked across the Pier at a solitary figure standing in so dark a shadow opposite, that she could only tell it was a solitary figure, and, whilst she looked, she talked on to Paddy, giving him what she intended to be his last enchanted draught, and Paddy drank his fill of the sweet poison, and then went striding away with his long legs to Sandown, for the last train had left Ryde a good two hours before. And though it was a long six miles, he blessed his stars that he was quartered but such a little way from this beautiful enchantress, and fancied himself the luckiest fellow alive, and could hardly believe he was, and then thought he was again, and got to Sandown almost before he knew he had started, having walked along an enchanted road.

Next morning Fanny would not go down the Pier with Lady Bulmer, as usual; no arrangement had been made by her with Major Bolton, nothing more had passed between them than here related, but she

knew whom she expected, and she prepared herself to receive him. Nevertheless it certainly looked very like an appointment, for when Major Bolton called at half-past twelve, an hour at which Fanny and Lady Bulmer were almost invariably to be found upon the Pier, he seemed not at all surprised by the footman's answer, "Yes, sir; Miss Berkeley is at home, sir," had in fact already thrown away his cigar before he heard it.

On entering the drawing-room, he took up his position on the sofa beside Fanny.

"You expected me?" he said.

"Of course," she replied with a little toss of her head.

Then there was a pause, during which Major Bolton pulled his moustache, as if he were quite at his ease, only rather at a loss for a subject of conversation, and Fanny re-arranged the skirts, whose fresh symmetry he had somewhat disturbed by sitting down so near her, looking as if she also were quite at her ease, and not at all

at a loss for a subject, feeling herself in no wise called upon to begin the conversation. At last Major Bolton spoke :—

"So you want me to believe that you have cared for me all through? What do you take me for?"

"I am sure it does not matter to me, whether you believe it or not—not in the least," she added emphatically.

"But I do believe it, for—for I want you to believe the same of me."

"Do you, indeed? I wonder what you take me for."

"It is easier for you than for me, for I have never been engaged to anyone, while you——"

"While I have been engaged to a dozen or so, as of course you know," said she, eyeing him with a cold, hard expression, "but I've heard you talked of with one or two—married women."

"I never cared for one of them."

"Nor I for the men."

He had passed his arm round her, and was holding her to him, and now she hid her face on his shoulder, sobbing out: "Oh Harry, I wish I had been a better girl for your sake."

"Nonsense, Fanny, you know I have not deserved it," was all his answer, but his voice was not quite so harsh and grating as it generally was.

"The long and the short of it is, it all resolves itself into a question of £ *s. d.*, and who is to pay the piper," said he after some time spent in rather an unintelligible sort of conversation, which nevertheless seemed to be very intelligible to the two talking. "I've calculated a good many things about you Fanny, in my time, but I never have calculated the exact figure of your fortune."

"Three hundred. Flo has only one, but an old aunt, who was my godmother, left me the other two, bless the dear old thing. It would be a long time before cousin Mary would ever do anything half so handsome by me."

"Better luck than I expected," said Major Bolton thoughtfully, pulling his long moustache as if to see how much better, "but you are in debt, I suppose?"

"Pretty well," said Fanny curtly. "As to you, I know what you've got, and of course it is next to nothing, so the Bulmers will never hear of our marriage, but that don't signify."

"No, we must do without their congratulations, and that reminds me, I'll go before Lady Bulmer comes in."

He stood up, and Fanny stood up too, and as he bent to kiss her, she whispered: "Yours till death now, Harry. If you want to get rid of me, you will have to kill me, remember."

"Yes, yes, I'll remember," he said, but yet he seemed loath to part from her, and stood still looking at her, and pulling at his long moustache again. "Oh Fanny, I never thought it would come to this," said he at last, clasping her to him again, and

grinding his teeth. "By hell, if I had ever thought it would come to this—"

"You'd have been a good boy, and saved up your odd halfpence. I knew it would come to some such prosaic ending, but you need not swear about it, and you know you never would have in any case. It is a long time since first I knew you, Harry, and I have always heard of you off and on, and you never were that kind of man. Of course you have debts."

"Men's debts are not like women's though," said he gloomily.

"No! and men can win fortunes at billiards, which women can't do. Never mind, the past cannot be changed, and we must take each other just as we are. It is too late to change now."

"Yes," he said, "we must take each other just as we are," and he looked at her, looked at the fair handsome face, the only one that had ever given him a sensation, and that had given it to him years

ago, and never let him leave off feeling it till now, and he ground his teeth again, and as he did so he seemed to be cursing somebody. It could hardly be her, was it himself he was cursing? it was a little his way. Or was it the men she had been engaged to?

"What a brave girl she is," he thought to himself, as he walked slowly home, "she knows what I am, and she is ready to dare everything with me, and she is not a girl who does not understand what that means, and then people run her down, and say there is no good in her, oh! what fools people are! I always knew there was something in her, or she could not have made me care for her, as she has done. Oh God, to think what we have lost! but she is not like other women, and now—oh! now we'll pull through together."

Fanny meanwhile lunched with Lord and Lady Bulmer—Lord Bulmer was one of those men, who always eat luncheon when they can

get it, running it down all the time as the most unwholesome unnecessary meal possible—and she made friendly talk with them just as easily, as if she were not fresh from taking such a step in life, as would probably for ever cut their friendship, when it once became known to them, as it infallibly soon must.

That afternoon it was a very delicious feeling to her to be joined by Major Bolton on the Pier quite at once, and as a matter of course, and to walk up and down with him beside her, saying little things that were very expressive to the two, that understood each other, but rather puzzling to poor Paddy, who began to be restive and troublesome, so after a little Major Bolton sauntered away, leaving her to finish him off as she best could. Then Fanny tried all she could to repress an offer, but of course she might as well have tried to stop a river at the full, as to stop an Irishman from making an avowal

of his affection when he was bent upon doing so.

"What right has Major Bolton to treat you in that off hand way?" began Paddy again.

"The right that I am engaged to him."

"That you are engaged to him—engaged to Major Bolton! Oh, Miss Berkeley, how can you suggest such a dreadful idea! how can you be so cruel as to—to joke about it, when I am so desperately in earnest?"

"So am I, quite in earnest."

"You know how much I love you, or rather you can never know. Tell me there is no truth in what you were saying, that you were only saying it to tease me."

"No; I don't want to tease you, Mr. O'Neile, and it is all true, only, please, you must not tell anybody, not anybody just yet. And I should never have made you happy, you'll soon get over it."

"Shall I?" said Paddy almost savagely; then, "when was it settled?"

"Only this morning, so I could not have told you before, and I did mean what I said last night. Nobody could ever call Major Bolton a *nice* man. I know that, I am not marrying him with my eyes shut, but I am not a bit afraid, only *very very* sorry for the pain I know I am causing you. Yes, I know I am giving you pain, and I know what that sort of pain is to bear, and that I have behaved very badly to you, and I am very sorry for it, Mr. O'Neile, very."

She looked up at him, he was no longer fixing an imaginary company ahead, with his light blue eyes, they were rooted to the ground now, and Fanny thought her great dog looked very disconsolate. "You will marry a nice girl some day, somebody quite different from me, I hope, who would never behave to anyone as I have to you, and let me know whenever you do, for I shall

never be *quite* happy till I hear you are so. We have been friends such a long time now, and I always have liked you."

They had come back to Lady Bulmer and Evelyn Gordon and the others now, and Fanny held out her hand to the tall Irishman, looking him full in the face, whilst he could not lift up his eyes from the ground, as if he were the guilty one and not she, and he wrung the hand she held out to him, once—twice, then he cast it from him and strode off with long, quick steps. That afternoon he rattled along to Sandown in the train, but the way seemed very long and dreary to him, and when he arrived at his solitary barrack-room, the tall, fair man covered his face with his hands and sobbed like a child, for there was no longer any blissful doubt, he knew now that he was not the luckiest of men, and, more bitter still, he knew now that some one else was.

CHAPTER V.

"IN THE HOUR OF MY DISTRESS."

THE second time that Percy Gordon saw Florence Berkeley was at St. Mary's, he had been lured there by Evelyn, who with a woman's love for novelty was longing to hear a sermon from that Father Thornton, whose eloquence was now become the talk of the place, as so impassioned and yet so polished. Percy recollected Mr. Thornton's sermons at St. James's Cray, and did not care much about hearing him again, but he went in the end, and a little in front of them he saw Florence. She was often there now, and people had begun to

talk confidently of her going or coming over, according to their own way of thinking, and supposed she would next become a nun by way of astonishing the world. "She won't stay in a convent long though," they would add, as if the only crime that could increase her guilt in going into one, would be her coming out again. Percy Gordon believed all that he heard of her more or less, and as he saw her sitting in front of him, very devout and never once glancing round, and thought of his wife by his side, and listened to Mr. Thornton, whom he had last heard preaching such a very different doctrine, he could not help thinking it was a queer world, a very queer world certainly. "I used to think the parson was spooney upon Florence, I remember," he thought to himself, and then his attention was caught by one of Father Thornton's most poetical flights.

His sermon was upon the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, and was, as is often

the case in English Roman Catholic churches, addressed rather to her possible future worshippers, pretty numerous in the church just then, than to those who already were so. He was speaking of her now as she has been painted for us by the great masters of old days, and this part of his sermon was so very picturesque, so very glowing in its colours, that it was not easily forgotten by any of those who heard it, even the most inappreciative, and raised Mr. Thornton's reputation as a preacher higher far than it had yet stood. "By Jove, I could think it was Florence he had been speaking about," said Percy to himself when it was all over, "the man is very eloquent, but what nonsense it all is!" and then he looked at Florence, still on her knees, lingering for a little quiet meditation after the rest of the congregation had flocked out, and, remembering all he had heard of her of late, a few rather irreverent thoughts arose in his mind.

"It is all a pack of nonsense," he murmured to himself, only the more indignantly, because there was a great sorrow at his heart. He had never looked on Florence's face yet since their parting long ago, and he vowed to himself that he never would look on it again, not if he could help himself. Then he walked away from St. Mary's, and was almost cross with Evelyn, who had been quite carried out of herself by Mr. Thornton's eloquence, and could not understand that Percy had not been so also.

After that Evelyn went often to St. Mary's, but without Percy now, he would never go there again. And she often met Florence there, and became better acquainted with her, and no longer thought her a regular English country girl, and nothing more. They were both unhappy, both Evelyn and Florence, these two girls who had both loved the same man, and alike unhappily, though one had become his wife. They were both now also trying to

find comfort in a new religion, and this made a sort of sympathy between them, and they talked together about St. Mary's —Florence reasoning about the distinctive doctrines of the Church of Rome, in the way that people do reason when they want to convince themselves; and Evelyn, who knew nothing about the distinctive doctrines of any church, her own included, talking of her feelings, and so talking, feeling the more. Mr. Thornton found her a very easy convert, he met her at Mrs. Cholmondeley's, where she would sometimes go home with Florence, and where, though other Roman Catholic priests were excluded by Lord Bulmer's special orders, he alone was admitted as a personal friend, and he met her at her own home, for he had of course known Percy Gordon in the old days, and they now renewed their acquaintance.

At last it came to Evelyn's asking Florence whether she thought Percy would be very angry at the idea of her seceding. It

was on Florence's lips to say that she thought he would be so very angry, as never to consent to have the subject even discussed, when she hesitated. Was not Percy himself just the character to become a Roman Catholic?

"It might be the means of taking him over too," she said, and then she would have given worlds not to have said it, for this seemed the one thing needed, and Evelyn at once exclaimed joyfully, as if she had no need of further conviction herself—

"Oh, do you really think so? What could be greater happiness than leading him into the bosom of the true church? And you think I may be the instrument appointed. Oh, thank you, thank you, Florence, you have made me so happy," and she kissed Florence for the first time, and tripped lightly home without giving her time to say another word.

Florence felt very serious about it, and very penitent, for she was not herself quite

convinced yet, and she saw what effect her words had had upon Evelyn, but she did not realize then, what further effect they were to have. Percy had for some time neglected his wife, now he seemed to have a tangible source of complaint against her, and he was not slow to avail himself of it, and to discuss the subject with Mrs. Northwey, who naturally was his comforter, in return for his being hers. The comforting indeed seemed to be all at cross purposes, for Evelyn in her turn went to Father Thornton, who could only tell her that it is "through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God," and exhorted her to patience, and she was patient, which, poor child, was the best thing she could be now, for matters had got quite beyond her stopping by this time.

Mrs. Cholmondeley meanwhile was getting better, and no longer needed such constant attendance, and Lady Bulmer finding nothing came of it, had given up her fear

of infection, so there being nothing any longer against Florence's returning home again, she did so, looking more beautiful than ever, as Lord Bulmer told her, but feeling still just as weary and sick at heart, as when she went away.

The experiment had not been a successful one as far as she was concerned. Cyril Thornton was dissatisfied with it. It had been quite as much for Florence's own sake, as for the unfortunate Mrs. Cholmondeley's, that he had taken the bold step of asking her to go and nurse this unknown invalid. He was a priest now, and an enthusiastic one, but he had known Florence Berkeley from a child, and he was not only desirous of her conversion. Though very desirous of that, he desired something more also, he wished to gain comfort for her, and he saw that there was something, he did not know what, though he had his suspicions, preying upon her mind, and he thought that a little useful and engrossing occupation would be

the best cure for her. He had succeeded in getting that for her, but somehow the experiment had not been a successful one. Nursing might have been good for Florence, but the nursing Mrs. Cholmondeley had not been at all good for her. At first the poor woman had, as indeed Mr. Thornton had said, been half out of her mind, and she had been half out of her mind from the loss of her husband, whom she had married at seventeen, and never been separated from since, and her lamentations for him were hardly very soothing to Florence, whose own heart was still sore and aching from a recent wound. Then she had grown saner, and talked—talked in a wild sort of way, chiefly about him of course still, but a good deal about his religion too, which had only been hers since she had married him, and a good deal also about her own people, who seemed to be a queer lot, almost all on the stage in one capacity or another, and all with strange stories too, which she seemed to like to di-

late upon. The late Mr. Cholmondeley had evidently married far beneath him, but the other well-to-do Cholmondeleys, who had not made *mésalliances* themselves, seemed always to have patronised his lowborn bride, and to have visited her, and invited her to their grand houses every now-and-then, whenever they felt inclined to do a kindness. Now they seemed to have left her to her fate for a little, as her own relations had done also. From them she had been a good deal cut off since her marriage, but she talked of them all, seeming to bear them no malice for their temporary abandonment, and Florence felt rather confused by her talk, which was unlike anything she had ever heard before, even in her Italian wanderings, and only made life seem yet more tangled to her. Still she could not help liking the wild impulsive creature, to whom she herself had been enabled to show so much kindness, always a powerful bond, and Mrs. Cholmondeley in return perfectly

adored the calm, beautiful young girl, who was as Lady Bulmer said, just like a saint, and had been a saint indeed to Mrs. Cholmondeley; and when at last Florence thought fit to leave her one evening, and was saying good-bye to her, and promising to come in early next morning, to see how she had slept, Mrs. Cholmondeley threw her arms round her, and covered the still pale face with hot passionate kisses.

"Good-bye, good-bye, you dear beautiful angel. I can never thank you enough, so I shan't try now, I shall only pray for you every night and morning, and ask God to thank you, as I never can. But don't forget me now, as I shall never forget you, and promise me, though it seems absurd to ask you now; but promise me, if ever you want a friend, or anything done for you, you'll ask me among the first."

It was much the same promise that Cyril Thornton had asked of her years ago, and that Florence had refused to make to him,

but now she was different, and Mrs. Cholmondeley was different, and everything was different, so she said: "Yes, I promise, dear Mrs. Cholmondeley, and I thank you now—for fear I should not be able to do so then," she added, with a shadowy smile. "But do not fancy you are saying good-bye to me now, for I mean to see a great deal more of you, you must not flatter yourself that you are strong enough yet to do without your nurse altogether."

Then Florence went home, and Lord Bulmer told her she was more beautiful than ever, and insisted on her coming down the Pier with them after dinner, and getting a little fresh air after all her recent confinement, so she went and talked to Sir Henry Digby. He had been away at home for some time, but now he was "on leave" again, having come down to see about a private yacht race between two schooners, in which he was much interested. He had only just come down, and had heard nothing as yet

of what had been going on during his absence, and Florence found his easy man-of-the-world tone a very pleasant change after Mrs. Cholmondeley's sick-bed ravings and Mr. Thornton's somewhat high-flown æsthetics. She talked to him, and noticed what went on around her in her quiet way, and though it was too dark to see much, still she saw that Major Bolton seemed to be very much at his ease with Fanny, more so than Florence considered quite natural, recollecting what there had once been between them, and how it had all been brought to an end long ago. She saw also that Evelyn Gordon was not on the Pier at all, and that Percy was sitting in an attitude, she herself had known well once long ago, looking into Mrs. Northwey's large *simpatica* eyes. He had his back turned to the rest of the Pier, and never once came to speak to her, nor even looked towards her, as far as she could make out, but this did not pain Florence so much as to see him sit-

ting talking to Mrs. Northwey in that cool pleasant moonlight. Fanny had told her a little about how that was going on, and as has been said, Florence had seen a good deal of Evelyn lately, of Evelyn always alone, and always sorrowful, except on that one occasion, and Florence thought of her now sitting at home without Percy, and felt very sad at heart for her.

Captain Northwey meanwhile was laying odds with some men about that schooner race, which had brought Sir Henry down to Ryde; he was going in one of the schooners, and was also much interested in it, and every now and then he looked over his shoulder at his wife, and wondered if he should find her still there, when he came back to Ryde. Well, he did not care, not he, he would just let her alone, and see how matters turned out, for at present he could think of nothing but the race; but he was not going to shield her like that fool Brown. No; if he found matters going on the same

way, when he came back from the race, she would not be his wife much longer, he knew that. If she was to be his wife, she must just alter her line of conduct, only meanwhile he would take no steps, for he was busy about other things. Still he wondered a little whether he should find her when he came back to Ryde ; the race would take some time, for it was no ordinary one, but something quite particular, and very exciting.

Sir Henry Digby was interested in the race also, but not so as to exclude other things, and he had not been long in Ryde before he knew all the gossip current, and had heard Florence Berkeley spoken of in a way which he would not stand, though "Gordon, who is her cousin, by Jove, sits by and says nothing, and more shame to him," as Sir Henry said emphatically to himself.

Then one man, who thought it would flatter Sir Henry, in which he would not

have been far out, had it been an ordinary case, suggested how "Sir Henry was a dangerous man, and being married, well! it was the worse for the young ladies," and Sir Henry himself thought it was perhaps his doing, and was a little flattered, but at the same time not a little grieved. He knew nothing about Lord Bellamour, whom Florence had now gained courage enough to cut in her turn, and in truth it was a good deal Sir Henry who had first brought her into such disgrace at Ryde. "The dearest, prettiest little girl that ever breathed," said Sir Henry, and wondered how he could repair the wrong that he thought he had been the means of doing her, and first, being an impulsive, warm-hearted man, even more than a man of the world, set about praising her right and left in the most exhaustive manner. This brought down a perfect storm of abuse on Florence's devoted head, with hints to Sir Henry, that he had better say nothing

about her, from Mrs. Clifford, and such people, who thought they might venture to speak. Then Sir Henry saw his mistake, and ceasing to praise her, tried to bring his influence to bear. Was he not a Baronet of large fortune? and was he not the intimate friend of all the best people about Ryde, as well as everywhere else, for the matter of that, at least so it always seemed to Sir Henry? Surely he could induce some of the women to talk to Florence Berkeley! but no, he found he could not do that. They were all devoted to him, and would be but too glad to do anything else for him, but they would not notice Florence Berkeley at Sir Henry's bidding. The more he tried to make them, the more obdurate he found them. Then Sir Henry felt that there was nothing for it, but for him to go away, but he was very downcast about doing this. He felt as if he were a coward, deserting Florence at her greatest need, and leaving her to face the enemies

he had made for her, and yet there was nothing else for it.

He had done no harm, no harm at least that he knew of, to all the innumerable girls he had flirted with, since one daring woman had taken heart of grace, and assumed to herself the title of Lady Digby, and now to Florence, who was so much nicer than any of them, worth all of them put together, as at this present time Sir Henry thought, he had done such incalculable harm. He really cared for Florence, was fond of her, and felt almost as sorry about the scrape he had got her into, as if she had been his own daughter. Unfortunately he was a notorious flirt, and had a very flirting manner at all times, and people thought he was sorry about it in quite a different way.

He had determined he must go away, but he could not go away without seeing Florence again. He had seen very little of her these last few days, while he had been

trying to right her in the world's opinion, but he could not go away now, when he had just found out how utterly powerless he was to repair what he had done, without asking her forgiveness for the great injury he had done her. So he went up early one morning to the Bulmers' house, and was admitted to see Florence alone, taking care to give himself a very short time before he must leave her to catch his boat, for though it was painful to think so, he knew it would be best that the interview should be a short one.

"I have come to say good-bye," he said after the few minutes of preliminaries we almost all allow ourselves before entering on the business we have in hand, just like the "Dear So-and-so," that figures at the top of all our notes, and might just as well be taken for granted, seeing there is the direction outside, except in those special cases where it stands for quite the other thing, and so may of course just as well not be taken for granted.

"To say good-bye! I thought you were so eager about this race, surely you are not going away before it?"

"Yes, I am though. It is the only thing I can do for you now. You see Mrs. Grundy will talk and see harm, where we know there is none."

Then Florence Berkeley was placed in that most humiliating position, in which a woman can be placed, namely that of being told by a man that she is getting too much talked about with him, and that therefore they must part.

There was a singing in her ears, and she felt as if he had insulted her, and yet he was the only man she had been able to treat as a friend since she came to Ryde. It was with difficulty she commanded herself, and retained her composure, but she succeeded in this, though it was difficult, and her voice was very calm and measured, when she next spoke, and only a slight quiver of the alabaster cheek turned to-

wards him revealed anything to Sir Henry of the conflict going on within.

"I am sorry you should have to go away on my account."

"Sorry! oh do not say that. It is the least I can do for you now. I have done you the greatest injury I could, and now all I can do is to go away, but God knows how sorry I am for it. Can you forgive me, my child?" he laid his hand on her shoulder as he spoke, treating her for the first time as if there were the forty years between them that there really were.

"I forgive you readily," she said, "for I can never look upon you as anything but the kind friend I have thought you from the beginning," and this she said with a quiet dignity that raised her even higher than before in Sir Henry's estimation.

"Thank you," he said, "I am more sorry about this than I have been about anything for a long time, and I feel I have been an old fool, for I ought to have known better,

and thought what an ill-natured world it is, as you'll know well enough, before you arrive at my time of life. Well, God bless you, my dear child, and if ever you come north drop me a line, and Lady Digby shall ask you down to Oakover, she will be charmed to see you, and we'll do what we can to amuse you. Ta ta, or I shall be late for my boat," and he walked off, trying to look as if he did not feel it, and Florence buried her face in her hands, and when she raised it again the marks of her fingers showed white upon her cheeks.

It was too, too dreadful—too trying to her pride. She had borne to be cut by the world, she knew nothing about, and did not care for, but that Sir Henry Digby, who had been kind to her, and whose opinion she valued, should think the ill-natured gossip that was talked of her sufficiently important to necessitate his going away from Ryde, without even hearing the result of the race, which had brought him

down so far away from home, that he should do this on her account, and tell her so, was more than she could bear. What had she done? oh, what had she done to be so humiliated? Horrid thoughts came crowding into her mind, and her head turned. She went to the window and leant out, longing, gasping for a breath of fresh air to revive her, and convince her that all that had just passed was but a dream.

Slowly, slowly a distant church bell fell upon her ear, at first she hardly heard it, then it broke upon her, and sent a cold shudder through her. It was like coming to her senses again, after a long fainting fit. She went swiftly up the stairs, and put on her hat and jacket, dashing cold water on her face as she did so, for she was faint and giddy, then she went swiftly down the stairs again, and passed into the outer air, for as yet she could not, could not breathe, try how she would. She hurried through

the streets, afraid to meet any one she knew, afraid to be seen by any one, following the distant church bell, till at last she stole into the church, just as the service was beginning. It was a long time since she had been to a week-day English service, always so much more impressive than that on the Sunday, when the rustling of dresses and the irreverent attitudes of many of the worshippers serve to distract all but the most devout, and are a trial even to them. Now kneeling low down in the all too empty church, with the clergyman's voice alone heard from the far away choir, the grand simple language of the English liturgy sounded more impressive to her than ever before. It seemed so full of meaning too, after the hurried mechanical repetition of the Latin prayers, at which she had so often assisted of late, only understanding them by the translation placed along side in her book; and as she joined in these prayers all the pride and

bitterness there had been in her heart, since she first heard of Percy Gordon's marriage, passed away, and she prayed as she had not now prayed for long. She knelt, crushed and humbled; she had trusted too much in her own intellect, had thought she could decide by her own reason what was truth and what was not, and now, in whatever way she was punished, could it be more than she deserved? She was penitent, and the horrid thoughts that had beset her, passed away, and good angels hovered round and comforted her. Though she came out of the church with heavy eyelids, and a still throbbing brow, she was happier than she had been for a long time. The world might think hardly of her, she would not trouble herself to find excuses for it, but neither would she think hardly of it in her turn, she would bide her time patiently, and some day perhaps it would think better of her. If not, she could still bear it, she would try to

act rightly herself, and if she was misjudged would take it as her cross. Everyone had their cross to bear, and she would strive to bear hers patiently, but she would seek no more help at St. Mary's—no, not ever there again. And then Florence thought of Evelyn Rivers, and wondered if there was no saving her, but in her heart she knew there was none.

If Sir Henry Digby had known how little place he occupied in Florence Berkeley's thoughts during the rest of that day, he would have been very far from feeling flattered, and much though he piqued himself on his knowledge of women, very much surprised.

CHAPTER VI.

"A WILFU' GIRL MAUN HAE HER WAY."

"Poor Florence!" said Fanny Berkeley. "I want to tell her, and I don't like to."

"Poor Florence," murmured Major Bolton, through his long black moustache.

"Why do you pity her so?"

"I don't pity her. I was only echoing what you said, you seemed to expect me to say something, and I thought that safest, not understanding what you wanted to tell her, nor why you did not like to."

They were on the Pier as usual. It is always the Pier at Ryde, which like *toujours perdrix* proves rather wearisome after a

time, though people still go there just the same; but this is not to the point here, for it was not wearisome in the least to Major Bolton and Fanny Berkeley. It was before luncheon, and the Bulmer party were all sitting in a group together under the awning, Florence and Evelyn Gordon a little apart on one side, and Fanny and Major Bolton a little apart on the other. Percy Gordon was not on the Pier, he had not been there lately, not since Florence had appeared again. It might be partly owing to that, but people did not put the two things together; they said that since Captain Northwey had gone away, and his wife no longer came down the Pier, Percy Gordon was to be found oftener than was quite necessary in Mrs. Northwey's little drawing-room. How they knew this it is impossible to say, since no one ever found him there, but certainly they were not so far out in their surmises as people generally are.

"What I want to tell her about is our engagement, of course."

"Well, why not? I am sure I don't object."

"I should think not," said Fanny, contemptuously, "but then you see I don't quite know how to set about it."

"I never knew you were so shy before."

"You see, poor child, I think she will be so jealous."

Major Bolton opened wide his wild restless eyes. "My dear Fanny, has this sun been affecting your head? there is nothing more dangerous than a sun-stroke, and the best remedy is—"

"A little common sense. You see, Harry, poor dear Flo has had an unfortunate attachment—something like me," she added, provokingly.

Major Bolton smiled, a smile that it was very pleasant to Fanny to see, reminding her of the Harry of old days, but then he grew grave again, graver than before. "Of

course. I have been blind not to see it. I always wondered where she had got that expression from. Poor little Florrie, what a bright, merry child she used to be!"

"Yes," said Fanny; "oh, it makes me furious, perfectly furious. She might have been so sweet and happy all her life but for him, and he never was worthy of her. I always knew he was not, though of course it was no use telling her so then, and she has given up all her life to him, and I believe she cares for him still, though she is such a little angel that she never shows it, and even makes friends with Evelyn, whilst I should strangle her, if I were in her place, or do something worse."

"What! was it Percy Gordon? well, one never knows what people see in each other."

"Oh, he was very fascinating, I grant her that, and very much in love too really at one time. I shall never forget that day, when he left St. James's Cray to go out to

Australia. He came out from saying good-bye to her, and I thought I had never seen any one look so miserable ; still I knew how it would end—I knew he would never be true. As to Flo, she has grown more and more like a lily ever since ; do you recollect how you used to call her rosebud ?"

"Yes, I remember," said Major Bolton, and again a smile stole over his face, very sweet to Fanny, "but do you mean they were engaged, or what ? who broke it off ?"

"No one. You see there was no hope, so I think they were quite right not to tell any one. Poor mamma was already very failing, and it would only have been vexing her unnecessarily ; and as to papa, of course he was no use. Only Flo told me, because she could not help herself, and she was so very miserable, she could not hide it from me. But they were engaged as much as they could be of themselves, and then he went away, quite broken-hearted I own, and nothing was heard of him ever again till he

turned up the other day with his pretty wife, whom somehow he does not seem to admire himself. I don't see much in him, though of course he is very fascinating, but as to Florence, I believe she has been in love with him so long, that she can't get out of the habit of it. Poor mamma, I often wonder what she would think of it now, if she were to see how broken-hearted her darling is, for there's no doubt about that unfortunately, and Florence always was such a pet of hers."

"Percy Gordon is a villain," said Major Bolton savagely. "I have thought so for some time, watching him running after that poor, innocent Mrs. Northwey, and leaving his own little wife to pine her very life out at home, but now that I hear this about Florence—a girl of whom he is no more worthy than—" he ground his teeth together, as he had a habit of doing, and the rest of his sentence was lost in his moustache.

"Harry! it is my turn to be jealous, now. I never knew you had this wonderful opinion of Florence," said Fanny, surprised.

"Did not you? well, it is odd, I daresay. You're the only woman I have ever loved, Fanny, and will be to the end of the chapter, but I have never respected even you, and yet I respect Florence. Yes, that I do," said Major Bolton, looking across the pier at Florence, where she sat by Evelyn Gordon, "and I think that Percy Gordon has thrown away the best chance of happiness that man ever had. It is curious, though, that he should have had it in his power to make two women break their hearts about him."

"Two women! why, you don't think Mrs. Northwey will?"

"No, I don't think that." Then there was a general adjournment home to luncheon, and their *tête-à-tête* was interrupted.

"Fanny," said Florence, looking up from

a drawing she was copying. "Is Major Bolton much changed from what he used to be?"

"Yes; don't you like him?"

"I have hardly seen enough of him yet, to know. There is something I can't help liking about him, but I hardly know what it is, and I have always fancied that at the time you used to care for him—"

"At the time I used to care for him! —what time?"

"What time! why, Fanny, surely you remember—"

"I remember a time at which I did not care for him. Yes, I do remember that, though it is a long time ago, but as to any particular time at which I cared for him! Why, I care for him now, I have cared for him for years, and I always shall care for him as long as I live, and after I have given up living too, I believe. Yes, and he cares for me too, Flo, so you need not look so frightened."

"Has he told you so?" asked Florence timidly.

"Yes, he has told me so," replied 'fascinating Fan,' and a golden smile of triumph played round her pretty red lips, and shone out of her dauntless blue eyes.

Florence thought she had never seen her sister look so beautiful, and she sprang up and throwing her arms round her, kissed her more warmly than she had ever done before.

"Oh, Fanny, I am so glad," she exclaimed, "so very glad."

"Thank you, Florrie dear, these are warmer congratulations than any I expected to receive; indeed, I thought I should have to do without them altogether."

"But why—why, Fanny, when you have loved him since so long, so very long ago, and you both must know each other so well, why should not everybody be glad that you are going to be married at last? is he not a good man? is he—"

"Oh, of course, I think him all that a man ought to be," replied Fanny gaily. "Yes, there is not one thing I would wish altered in Harry, though he was very dear in the old days, and he was very different then. But he would not suit *me* now, if he was still the same as he used to be. Oh dear, oh dear, it is such a long time ago!" Then breaking off again she exclaimed in her abrupt way: "Only don't you see, little Flo, Uncle Henry and Cousin Mary, and in fact everybody, have always looked to my marrying a rich man and a swell, and Harry is not either."

"He is not rich, I suppose. At least I never thought he was that, but he is of very good family. I don't remember, of course, but I thought you always told me it was his relations who objected formerly."

"Yes, they did object, though it was not that that put a stop to it, as I know now. But you see, I suppose, our relations have expected both of us to make good matches,

and we are neither of us a good match for the other, more is the pity. Not that it matters though, for Harry's people don't trouble themselves about him much now, and I shall not trouble myself about mine, I know that, if they don't approve. After caring for him, and him only, for all these years I can only rejoice in getting him at last."

"I don't quite understand your way of caring."

"I daresay not, you dear unsophisticated little creature. You can't understand how I have been engaged to so many men without caring for one of them, but then if I had cared for any one of them, why should I ever have been engaged to the others?" asked Fanny artfully. "You see, dearest, when he did not seem to think me worth having, I thought I would show him other people did at all events, and I have been playing that game all these years up to the very last moment, when he explained to

me how it was all had got broken off between us years ago."

"And how was it, Fanny?"

"Why he thought like a great goose—how he could be so stupid, I can't imagine —that I had gone and engaged myself to that silly Lord Loiterton, whom, of course, I was only amusing myself with, whilst he was away, and so like a great gander, what did he do but mount upon his high horse and bolt off to India without a word. Then when he arrived out there, he found it was all a mistake, so what does he do then but come home and hang about without coming near me, till he has set my pride up, and made me determine to show him somebody thought me worth having. Poor fellow, he says he was very ill, but I knew nothing of that," and Fanny's eyes glistened with tears. "Then he went back to India again, and never came home till the other day. Oh, Florence, it makes me mad to think what years of happiness we

have thrown away, and it was all my fault, I know it was," and as Florence was kneeling before her, Fanny hid her burning face in both Florence's cold hands, which she had seized hold of in her earnestness, but only for a minute, then she raised her head defiantly. "But it is all for the best after all. I should have made him a sad flirting wife if I had married him then, and should not we have had fierce quarrels, for he would easily be jealous, and we have both got tempers! Long before this, I daresay, we should have been separated, and both hating each other as cordially almost as we now love each other. We shall never quarrel now, I think," and again a happy smile flickered about Fanny's red lips.

"No, I hope not," said Florence, smiling rather an April smile. "I'm sure you'll try to be a good wife to him, won't you, Fanny?" she added in soft pleading tones, "and I do hope he will make you happy."

"That he is certain to," said Fanny

decidedly, "though I suppose other people will think we shall have a hard time of it. But it is not this sort of thing that makes one happy," said she contemptuously, trifling with a heavy gold bracelet as she spoke.

"No, I should think not." On that point, at least, the sisters were quite agreed. "And after all you have three hundred a year, and he has his pay, and I suppose something else, and so surely you will do very well. Besides, what are money troubles after all?"

"Exactly so," said Fanny, now laughing at herself, "what are they, you silly child? As if they did not cause all the greatest misery in the world; oh, we are a pair of delicious geese! But it is so nice to be happy, I can't help talking nonsense. Dearest Florence, I hope you will soon be as happy as I am."

"Not in the same way, Fanny, don't hope that for me. But I shall be very

happy in my own way some day, I dare-say."

"You are thinking of him still, but he is not worthy."

"No, he is not worthy," interrupted Florence, taking the words out of her sister's mouth now, much as Fanny had taken them out of hers, when they had been talking about Harry Bolton, "and don't fancy I am thinking about him any longer. Of course I see now, he is not what I thought he was, but still I did care for him once, for what I fancied him, and I shall never meet with anyone just like that now, and I can't care twice, not in that way. But I shall be quite happy in my own fashion some day; indeed, I should be now, if I could only see him happy, and Evelyn happy."

"I should hate her, if I were you, Florence."

"And I wish I had even any temptation to do that. But he does not love her, and

he never has, I am sure of that, for she is not the kind of woman he ever would care for. She cannot understand him, but she loves him very much—as much as she can love, I suppose—and oh, Fanny, I do pity her so, for she is his wife, and that must make it so much worse. What do you think made him marry her, Fanny?"

"Why, money of course—these money troubles you were speaking of, as if they were nothing; they have led Percy Gordon into marrying Evelyn, though he does not care for her. See how rich and comfortable he is now."

"But he was happier when he was poorer. I am sure of that, though I have barely seen him. And after all, surely it is happiness people really want, and they only care for money as a means?"

"Oh, now you are getting metaphysical, and quite beyond me. I can't pretend to reason about it. I daresay he was happier when he was poorer, as you say, and yet

don't we say he is 'well off' now, and that he was 'badly off' then? and in the same way I am going to be perfectly happy with Harry Bolton, though he is over head and ears in debt, I daresay, and we don't stand a bad chance of going to prison together, and so of course everyone will think it a miserable marriage, and will come condoling with Uncle Henry and Cousin Mary, oh, I can hear them now! Whilst if I was going to marry the Duke of Fiddlestick, with whom, of course, I could never have a moment's happiness, they would come flocking round me, all running over with congratulations 'so glad,' and 'such a happy marriage,' and 'so pleased at my brilliant prospects,' and all that bosh, which they have said again and again to me ever so many times, when there was not a chance of it, and I should have bolted to a dead certainty within the honeymoon, if it had ever gone so far as that. Now I shall bolt with Harry, if I ever bolt at all," and

Fanny rose up laughing, and shook her flowing skirts, and sleeked her shining hair, for she heard a visitor coming, and knew intuitively, who it was.

She was quite right, it was too showery to go upon the Pier, so Major Bolton had ventured within the Bulmers' doors again, though feeling he did so under very false pretences.

"So it is you, Harry, is it?" said Fanny, just as if she had not expected him in the least, and did not pride herself on knowing his footstep before it was even audible to anyone else. "Don't scowl at me so, Florence won't be scandalised, I have just been telling her all about it, and like the dear little goose she is, she thinks we have every chance of happiness, don't you, Flo?"

"I don't quite know about that, but I hope you have a good many, and I am very glad—very glad," she repeated, shaking hands warmly with Major Bolton.

"Thank you, little sister," said he, and

Florence was surprised to hear how sweet that ordinarily harsh voice could sound, and surprised also to see how very happy he could look, now that he had no cause to conceal his happiness. "Don't flit away now, for I want to make acquaintance with you, and Fanny and I have nothing so very private to say to each other. We used to be very good friends at St. James's Cray, but I daresay you have forgotten that, and we are all a good deal changed since then."

"Yes, but as far as I can remember you used to be anything but a friend of mine. Were you not always teasing me, and threatening to cut off a lock of my hair? I was very fond of my hair, I remember, and not at all inclined to have it cut off with the great big scissors you used to snatch up upon every possible occasion. It may have been all love and affection, but it seemed to me then very like teasing."

"I am sorry to have left such a disagree-

able impression on your mind, and I am afraid I have burnt the lock of hair. Oh did not you know I had got one? I cut it off when you were asleep, the very last night I ever was at St. James's Cray, do you mean to say you never missed it? However, I burnt it—with a few more things," said he looking at Fanny, "the second time I went out to India. Will you give me another now?"

"No, I don't think I will. Sisters don't give locks of hair to their brothers, and you are to be my brother now."

"Am I? when is it to be, Fanny? what are we putting it off for, will you tell me that?"

"Because we have not either of us the moral courage to announce it, I believe," said she. "But let us keep it to ourselves a little longer, I am so happy as it is."

"Well, so am I," said Major Bolton, leaning back on the sofa with an air of great contentment, "and I am never going

to disagree with anything you say, for we have had enough of that sort of thing. But you see my leave will soon be up, and of course the extension is doubtful, though I always count upon it."

"Of course you do, and so do I, so don't be disagreeable, Harry, but let us enjoy ourselves a little longer without being bothered by other people's comments. They are always as spiteful as they can be."

"Yes, that they are," and unconsciously Major Bolton's eye rested on Florence's pale face. She blushed scarlet under his gaze, and he hastily looked away, but still he had reminded her, though unintentionally, of some of her griefs, that had quite passed out of her mind while she had been hearing about her sister's engagement.

"Any news of those two yachts?" asked Fanny, seeing a gloom had fallen upon the little party, and wishing to distract the other two from their melancholy thoughts.

"Not yet, and I am sure it is to be hoped there never may be," said Major Bolton, still gloomily. "Gordon is a friend of yours, so I don't want to say any harm of him, but there will be the devil and all to pay when Northwey comes back. They are all full of nothing else at the club."

"Do you think it is his fault?" asked Florence, her deep blue eyes hanging upon Major Bolton's, so as to let slip no change of expression in his face.

He hesitated, but only a heightened colour showed how difficult he found it to decide in what manner he would answer her question. At last he said—

"You mean whether it is young Gordon's fault—I say it is. There is no harm in Mrs. Northwey, though she has made the mistake—an awful one too—of marrying that brute. But I say it is Gordon's fault, all his, for I don't believe he has even the excuse of caring for her, and so only to flatter his confounded vanity, he has been doing all he

can for the last month or more to drive two women wild about him. I don't wonder he has succeeded, with his wife at least, for he has merits, if only he were not so desperately vain and selfish. And now I suppose I have sunk myself for ever in your good opinion, Miss Florence?"

"No," said Florence, very gravely; "I may think you mistaken, but I think you mean what you say, and that is a great thing."

"I generally do that," said Major Bolton, "so you will soon see what a disagreeable fellow I am, if you don't know it already. But in this instance I should not have gone out of my way to abuse your cousin, if it were not that I think it better you should be prepared for what is to come."

"And what is to come, Harry?" asked Fanny. Florence did not speak.

"Why, simply his bolting with Mrs. Northwey; at least I suppose he'll have sufficient pluck to do that now, seeing he

has brought her into such a peck of troubles, and that he does not care for his wife either," and Major Bolton laughed a cold, hard laugh. "Mrs. Northwey will never dare to face her husband's coming back now, so she'll throw herself upon his mercy, and then he'll have to choose between abandoning her or abandoning his wife, who, for some reason incomprehensible to us men, worships the very ground he treads on, so probably in the usual way he'll choose her—to abandon, I mean."

"It is too dreadful," exclaimed Florence, starting up, "can nothing be done to stop it? If Percy does not really care for Mrs. Northwey, could not something be done to prevent his going away with her? could not somebody persuade him? You know him, could not you?"

"And get kicked down stairs for my pains. No, I would not mind that for your sake, Florence, to please you; besides, he'd find me rather an ugly customer, I fancy.

But you see it would only make it a dead certainty instead of a doubt, which of course it is at present—not that there is much doubt," he muttered under his breath.

"Yes, yes, of course it would do no good at all a man going to Percy; but would not—oh, surely something can be done—oh, poor, poor Evelyn!"

"She is no use," said Major Bolton, "nor is Percy Gordon; going to either of them would only precipitate matters. No, the only person that would be any use would be Mrs. Northwey, but I don't envy the person who speaks to her about it, and I don't think it would do any good. She is a coward, and she has been very silly, though not worse, I believe, but her husband is pretty sure to think so, and she'll never stay to face him. Directly there is any news of the yachts she will bolt, you will see."

"Oh, she must not, she must not. She looks good and gentle, and she is so young,

and she will never be happy again if she does. Oh, somebody ought to speak to her."

"The person who did so would be doing her a kindness, but she is not likely to think so, and I do not believe it will do any good."

"But it might, it might. It is worth trying, at all events. Do you think it would be very wrong in me to go?"

"You!" exclaimed Fanny, while Major Bolton said dogmatically: "Very foolish! and I tell you no one will do any good. Of course you are the last person who ought to go," he muttered under his breath again, but Florence heard him.

"I don't think so—I don't think so," she exclaimed. "Percy is my cousin, and of course I care about him, and so I should not blame him to her, as, perhaps, some people might. Besides, I would beg and pray her so. Oh! I would not come away till she had promised me to wait till Captain Northwey

came back, and to bear whatever he said to her. For she has been silly—you say she has—and so she ought to bear it."

"I tell you what, Florence—you say you are to be my sister, and so I treat you as such. If it ever gets out that you have been to Mrs. Northwey, it will do you more harm than anything you have done since you came to Ryde. You wish to go from the best and purest of motives—I know you do—but you can't expect every one to believe that."

"I can't help it. I know they are good motives, and it is a right thing to do, and people have misjudged me so much already, I cannot stop to consider what they will think."

"There!" exclaimed Fanny, "there, Flo!" but Florence could not heed her triumph.

"If you go now, you will probably find Gordon there," said Major Bolton, taking out his watch. "Do you wish that?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Florence, distractedly. "When shall I go?—is he always there? He never used to like getting up early. I will go to-morrow morning," and then she ran away upstairs to her own room, and there sobbed her very heart out, much as she had prayed her very heart out when her father lay a-dying, and she prayed, and prayed, and prayed for one more moment for repentance for him.

"A strange child," said Major Bolton. "You must not let her go, Fanny."

"You do not know Florence if you think anything will stop her now. But how did you know that Percy was with Mrs. Northwey?"

"I did not know it. But when a woman has once got the bit between her teeth in the way that Florence took it just now, I know pulling is no use; you may pull your arms off, but she'll never budge a bit for that. The only thing is to gain time: she will be of a different mind herself when

she has slept upon it. You will see she will think quite differently to-morrow morning."

"And you will see she won't: you don't know us Berkeleys yet. Did you ever find me think differently in the morning to what I had thought the night before?"

"There cannot be two such headstrong girls in the world," said he, caressingly. "I will believe in your immutability if you like, but do let me think Florence a little bit like other women, if you please."

Then they talked on till it was fully time for Harry Bolton to take his leave, unless they wished to tell all, and confess to their engagement.

CHAPTER VII.

"LOVE WAS GIVEN, THAT SELF MIGHT BE ANNULLED."

"MRS. NORTHWEY is engaged, she can't see anyone."

"Is she up?"

"Oh yes, Miss, she is up, but she can't see anyone, not anyone."

"I am very sorry, but I must see her. Will you tell her so, please?"

"Indeed I can't, Miss, I can't really."

"Where is she?"

"She is in the sitting-room, but she is particularly engaged, she told me on no account to let anyone in."

"Is there anyone with her?"

"Oh dear no, Miss, but still she is engaged, and it would be as much as my place is worth to show anyone in to Mrs. Northwey, when she says she is engaged."

"Well then I shall show myself in, for I must see her," and Florence Berkeley walked calmly past the embarrassed maid, and went on up the staircase with a beating heart, for all her quiet composed appearance. This opposition had only made her the more anxious and the more determined. For she took it as a bad sign that Mrs. Northwey should be so very bent on not seeing anyone, when she was not ill, the maid had owned as much, and had got no one with her. "You may as well announce me," she said turning to the maid, who had followed her up the stairs, "for you see it is positively necessary that I should see Mrs. Northwey."

The maid was cowed, and began almost

to think she must have made a mistake. "What name shall I say?"

"Miss Florence Berkeley."

The maid threw open the door and announced her, and Florence, without pausing for an instant, entered the little sitting-room, pretty with many tastefully arranged flowers, and bright with a broad stream of summer sunshine pouring in through the wide open window, near which Mrs. Northwey was sitting. She was evidently doing nothing, she had not had time even to alter her position, had she wished to do so, and it was quite clear at once that she certainly was not too much engaged to see visitors; her head was resting languidly on one hand, and she was gazing out of the open window, the pupils of the large brown eyes contracted and dazed by the glare upon the sea.

She did not know Florence more than by sight, but she seemed confused at seeing a visitor, and in her enbarrassment

she walked forward, and shook hands with her, saying as if her being there were a matter of course : "How do you do, Miss Berkeley ? Oh, do take this chair, you will find it more comfortable. Is not this a delicious day, so much less wind than we have had lately ?"

Florence was rather taken aback by such a cordial reception, she had not certainly been prepared for that, and she hardly knew what to answer.

Mrs. Northwey suddenly recollected she did not know her, and became yet more flurried in her manner. "So kind of you to come and see me, Miss Berkeley, of course I know you quite well by sight upon the Pier. Such a nice place the Pier ! one meets people so often there, that one really almost forgets sometimes, one does not know them all, one gets so accustomed to seeing them there."

"I did not forget though that I did not know you, when I came to see you to-day,"

said Florence gravely. At first the room had looked so bright and pleasant, and the little woman so pretty and so exquisitely dressed, that she did not know how she could ever speak about the subject she had in hand, but already she had seen signs of trouble in the heavy eyelids, and black rings under the large eyes, and without looking at them, and the pale face all a tremble with excitement, Mrs. Northwey's manner alone showed that all was very far from being right with her, so Florence was in haste to break the ice, and come at once to the business of her visit. Now Mrs. Northwey stared without speaking. "I hope I have not interrupted you in anything, you were busy about. The maid would hardly let me in."

"Oh no, I was not busy," said Mrs. Northwey slowly. She put her hands to her head, as if it ached so much, she hardly knew what she was saying. "I told her to say 'Not at home' because—because I

was—" she paused, now evidently not knowing what to say.

"Unhappy," suggested Florence in her gentle yet decided voice.

"How did you know that?" exclaimed Mrs. Northwey, now turning sharply round on her.

"It was because I knew it, that I came here—to be your friend. I know you want a friend," she added pleadingly.

"Yes, yes, I want a friend, but no friend can be of any use to me now. No one can do anything."

"Yes they can," said Florence. "When do you expect the yachts back?"

"Do you wish to drive me mad? what do you mean by coming and talking to me in this way? You have no right to yet. To-morrow perhaps—but not—not to-day," she added with increasing vehemence. "No one has any right to say anything to-day," and Mrs. Northwey stood up and looked as if she would leave the room her-

self, if her unwelcome visitor did not speedily relieve her of her presence.

Then Florence rose up also, and falling on her knees before Mrs. Northwey clasped her hands in hers. "Let me speak to you as a friend, Mrs. Northwey. Indeed, indeed it is as a friend I come to you."

"Speak then," said Mrs. Northwey, fixing her large tearful eyes upon her, "but it is no use to me having a friend now. It might have been," she added sullenly, "but it is too late now, for Captain Northwey will kill me when he comes back."

"No, he won't," pleaded Florence, "he will be angry with you perhaps, but he won't kill you, and you will bear his anger, for you have been silly, and—"

"I tell you I have done nothing, nothing," exclaimed Mrs. Northwey, now tearing her hands away, and walking hurriedly up and down the room. "You have no right to say anything to me."

"Yes, I have a right," said Florence,

now rising also, and standing facing Mrs. Northwey, with her hands tightly clasped, and her blue eyes full of tears, but not shrinking at all before the other's gaze. "I have a right, for I love Percy Gordon."

"You love Mr. Gordon!"

"Yes, I love him." Florence advanced and took hold of Mrs. Northwey's hand again. "And I cannot bear that he should be dishonoured, I cannot, cannot bear it, and you are the only person who can stop it now."

"He loves *me*—I *think* he loves me," said Mrs. Northwey.

"Then you have power over him. Oh, have pity, have pity, Mrs. Northwey; you know you do not love him yourself, not really."

Mrs. Northwey shuddered. "Captain Northwey will kill me," she said.

"No, he won't, for you do not really love Percy Gordon. You would never have thought of going away with him, if it were not that you are afraid of your husband.

Be brave, and save Percy Gordon. You will kill his wife if you take him from her, she loves him so very dearly, and she is a frail gentle little creature pining away with the idea already."

"Ah, you want me to save him for you. You love him, and when she is dead you will marry him—you."

"I shall never marry him."

"Swear it to me, swear it to me," laughed Mrs. Northwey.

Florence hesitated. "Will you swear to me then, that you will not go away with him?"

"Oh, I am not going away with him. You are very impertinent to think any such thing. But I see what it is, you think she will die, and when she is dead, you will marry him yourself—you."

Florence held out her hand, "I swear to you that I never will. Now do you swear in your turn, say, 'I will never go away with Percy Gordon.'" She spoke as if this had already been agreed on between them,

and Mrs. Northwey repeated her words almost mechanically. "Now remember you have sworn it. You can never go away with him now," said Florence, "remember you never can."

"But he is coming here—he is coming to —to arrange—"

"When do you expect him?"

"Now. Every minute. I was expecting him when you came in."

"Tell the maid to say you are engaged."

"Oh, but he will come in, he will never mind."

"Tell her to say that some one is here."

"But I must see him, I must see him again," and this time Mrs. Northwey fell at Florence's feet, and crouched before her with the tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Remember you have promised," said Florence; "are you strong enough to hold out if you see him?"

"No—no." Then she rose again. "I tell you it is no use, Miss Berkeley. I am

not angry with you now, nor anything ; you have meant to be very kind, I daresay, but I must go with him now. I can't help my promise. How can you care for him ? He never speaks to you now. He has been out in Australia for ever so many years. He is your cousin, I know, and of course you care for him as a cousin, but that must be all."

"No, no, it is not," said Florence. "I do not care for him as a cousin ; I don't think I ever have. I loved him long ago, and he loved me too then, and we promised to be true to each other, and he went out to Australia. I never heard of him after that till just lately, but I have loved him all these years. He must soon have left off caring for me, I suppose, but I have never left off caring for him, and now he has come home again with a wife, and I know I must not love him any longer, not in that way, and I do not, I do not. But I do love him still, though in a different sort of way—

for I would never be his wife now; but I do love him still, and I cannot bear that he should be dishonoured. I would lay my life down to save him," she whispered. Her voice had been very low throughout, but now it was almost under her breath, and Mrs. Northwey had to strain her ears to listen to her. "I would lay my life down to save him, but that that would be of no use, so I have come to you, which is worse, but I have come to you, for you only can save him since—he—loves you."

The tears were streaming down her cheeks as she spoke, but she stood quite still with her hands clasped, and to Mrs. Northwey, who tore up and down the room, when she was agitated, and sobbed aloud, this stillness was more terrible than anything else could have been. She drew near to Florence almost tremblingly now, and just touched her cold hands with one of her own, as if to bring her back to life and motion again.

"I will go and tell Mary to say some one

is here, when Mr. Gordon comes, and not to show him up. I will never see him again, I promise you," she whispered in tones scarcely louder than Florence's own.

She went from the room, and only just in time, for as she came back again, they heard Percy's knock, and Mrs. Northwey threw herself on the sofa sobbing, and Florence folded her in her protecting arms, till they heard him go away again. He did not go away till the maid said, "It is Miss Florence Berkeley who is here," and Florence heard her say it, and it only sent one more pang through her heart. Percy would be certain to guess now, what she had come about, she thought, for he must surely know she was no acquaintance of Mrs. Northwey's.

"Florence, dear—I may call you, Florence, may not I?—you must have been very miserable when your engagement with Mr. Gordon was broken off. How was it broken off? Do tell me now."

"It never was broken off."

"It never was broken off—and he married another girl while he was engaged to you! Why did you not tell me that before? I could never have cared for any man who was so false, so base."

"He may not have considered it quite an engagement. You know no one knew anything about; it was only between ourselves, and I should not have told you of it now, but that you seemed to doubt that I could care for him. You must please never mention it to anybody, for I should not wish it to be known. It was all years ago."

"I will never speak of it to anybody," said Mrs. Northwey, "but how you must have hated Mrs. Gordon, when you first saw her."

"No," said Florence, "she had never done me any wrong."

"Yet you don't seem to hate him either. And do you know I have hated her sometimes. She is so much more beautiful and graceful than I am, and sometimes I have

hated her, when I thought he was only playing with me, and would go home to her, and they would laugh at me together. At first I always thought he was playing with me. Oh! I took a long time to be sure of him. But now what shall I do, when he comes again? of course he will come again."

"When do you expect the yachts back?" asked Florence, this time without having the effect of maddening Mrs. Northwey.

"We thought—he thought—I mean Mr. Gordon said he heard they would almost certainly be here by to-morrow morning, but they might come to-day perhaps. Only there is very little wind," she added, glancing out again at the molten sea, without even a ripple to fleck its even surface.

"It will be all right as soon as Captain Northwey is back."

"He will kill me. I tell you he will kill me," said Mrs. Northwey, growing very

white ; "you don't know what he is, when he is angry. You said you would lay down your own life for Mr. Gordon, well! it is just that you have asked me to do for him."

"No, no," said Florence, soothingly. "What should Captain Northwey be angry for? as you said, you have done nothing, and there is nobody will tell him anything."

"Oh, people talk so. You don't know how people talk."

"Yes, I do know," said Florence sadly, whilst Mrs. Northwey bent and kissed one of the hands, that were now lying very limp and tired on Florence's lap, and still very cold, "but I think people's own relations are the last to hear anything about them, and surely a husband would be the last of all. Who would dare to tell Captain Northwey anything about you? You must try to be a good wife to him, and then he will soon see there is nothing wrong,

even if anyone should be so cruel, as to put any such ideas into his head."

"But he has got them already—I know he has, and he is sure to ask the servants how often Mr. Gordon has been here. I could depend on Mary not to tell him, if I asked her, but I could not bear to do that, and then the others! I could never depend on them. If I bribed them even, they might take the money, but they would tell all the same. At least it is ten to one they would."

"Yes, and you could not stoop to bribing them either, so that is out of the question. But suppose Captain Northwey is a little angry, can you not bear it? do you not think you deserve it even a little?" and Florence bent over Mrs. Northwey like a beautiful young angel of Justice.

"It will not be a little though. Captain Northwey is never a little angry. Oh, Florence, won't you stay with me? I am so frightened."

"I would stay with you, and gladly, dear Mrs. Northwey, if I thought it would be of any use. I wish I thought it could be, but I am afraid it would only make matters worse," and Florence looked gravely at the little woman, to see if she did not agree.

"My poor dearest," exclaimed Mrs. Northwey, putting her arm round her and kissing her, "it is a great shame the things they say of you. I have always said it was, even when I did not know you, and do you know, I have always so wished to know you. I felt sure we were to be friends some day; I never knew how it was to be though. Oh dear! oh dear! but call me Katie, won't you? Mrs. Northwey sounds so formal, and every one always used to call me Katie," and the young wife gave a long heavy sigh, that sounded very like a sob.

"Katie, then," said Florence, smiling through her tears, for they were flowing again now in the silent way in which Flo-

rence's tears always did flow, except when she was quite alone, "if I were you, I will tell you what I should do. I should just tell Captain Northwey myself, before anyone else got a chance of doing so, how that I had been very silly, and was very sorry, and hoped he would forgive me; and then, if I were you, I think I would get him to take me away somewhere, if I could, to some place where no one would know anything about it."

"Florence," said Mrs. Northwey solemnly, "you think yourself very unfortunate, I daresay, not to have married the man you loved; but I will tell you what is much worse, to marry the man you love and to find out he is——"

"Hush, recollect he is your husband," said Florence, warningly.

"But you are my guardian angel, and I must tell you everything. I have promised you I will never see Mr. Gordon again, and I never will if I can help it; but I can't

live with my husband. It is impossible. I can't—not much longer."

"Try," said Florence, "try, and pray."

"Yes, I will, I will. And I have tried, and I have prayed ; but when he says those cruel things to me, I get mad, and I don't know what I answer, and then, oh ! then, he grows like a wild beast," and Mrs. Northwey buried her face in her handkerchief, as if to shut out the terrible recollection.

"Still he is your husband now, and it is your duty to try to be a good wife to him. You will fail sometimes perhaps, but what will be considered hereafter, will not be how often you failed, but how much you tried. Now, had I not better leave you ? would you not be best alone ?"

"No, no, never best without you ; still you had better leave me, for I don't know about the yachts, and if Captain Northwey came home, and found you here, it would provoke him yet more. I will go and lie down in my own room, and lock the door,

and then no one can get in to me," and Mrs. Northwey stood up all flushed and trembling, and threw her arms round Florence, and kissed her still pale cheek. "Good-bye, Florence, you have got what you wanted out of me, and you have come to me just like my guardian angel, when I needed you most, but I can't thank you yet, though perhaps some day I shall, for I know you have been my guardian angel."

And Florence kissed Mrs. Northwey too. "Be brave," she said, "be brave, and God will help you." Then as she was going from the room, she paused at the door for an instant, and coming back, said —"If you ever want me, send for me, and I will come at once. You have only to let me know. But I am afraid I can be of no use now, so be brave—be brave."

That afternoon the yachts came in.

CHAPTER VIII.

"I WILL LOVE HIM MORE, MORE THAN ERE WIFE LOVED BEFORE."

"I've lost a fiver," said young Clifford, trying to assume the air of a man to whom such misfortunes are common. "I backed Mrs. Northwey to have bolted before ever Northwey came back, and now here he is, and, what is worse, so is she."

"It is a pity you have not lost more," said Major Bolton, in the old harsh tones still kept for the benefit of the world in general. "You ought to be at school, sir; what does your father mean by letting you waste your precious time in this way?"

"I am going up for the Admiralty next Exam. Whitehall branch, of course," said young Clifford, jauntily.

"In that case you will be plucked as sure as I shall make this cannon," said Major Bolton, succeeding in his stroke as he spoke. They were in the billiard room at the Club, only two of them playing, Major Bolton and Lord Bellamour, and the rest looking on, for these two were well matched, and to watch them was as good as playing any day.

"I say Bolton, what do you mean by going in for the season ticket in the way you are doing? You are surely not going to take a return by her to last till next year, and the season is up, so it is no go?"

"Is not it?" said Major Bolton, with great coolness. His luck was in the ascendant that day, and he was not going to be distracted from his game.

"Of course not. She only cares for the men to give her bouquets and trinkets, and

pay her little odd expenses when she has not got her purse with her—generally the case with the fair Fan. You have cut out that long fellow, but it is no good now, there is nothing going on—no season anywhere—not unless you are to go to Brighton after her. She can't make any use of you here now, so depend upon it she will soon have nothing to say to you."

"She is not going to Brighton."

"Not going to Brighton! Miss Florence Berkeley told me—" began Lord Bellamour.

"Hold hard, Bellamour! I cry off if you begin your infernal old cackle. It was only on those conditions I began to play, remember, and don't mention Miss Florence Berkeley again in my presence, if you please. You know well enough she has not spoken to you for a month, nor ever will again."

"So it is to you that I owe——"

"No, it is not; I have had nothing to do with it, so don't begin to do the im-

posing over me, and don't jaw, for if you once begin to give tongue, I throw down my cue. There, it is your turn now. Have you marked me, Piper ?"

"Well, but about the season ticket, I suppose we may talk about her," said the man who had asked before, a Mr. St. John, who looked as if he might have been old enough to have been above troubling his head about such matters.

"Oh, ay, speak about her, and welcome; it won't do her any harm, nor me either, and, what is more, I sha'n't bear you any malice afterwards. There, it is my game, so your confounded old tongue is loose again, Bellamour, and I had better hook it. Only as you all seem interested, I may as well tell you the wedding won't be a swell one, and I fear there will be no breakfast to invite you to; still, if you like to go and see a fellow turned off, why, do it, and welcome. *Au revoir*, for I daresay I may see some of you there," and Major Bolton

sauntered towards the door, as if he had not dropped a thunder bolt into the midst of the club.

"I should think you would see some of us there," said the first man to recover breath enough to speak.

"We'll look out that the thing is done properly when you are turned off, my boy," said another.

"Yes; and every man Jack of us will go to see the Season-ticket spliced," exclaimed Lord Bellamour. "I say Bolton, my boy, I did not think you were so green as all that. I should not have wondered so much ten years or so ago, but I thought you were too old a hand to engage the Season-ticket for life."

"On the contrary, I was rather young at the time, and it does not do to keep that sort of thing dangling on for ever, so we have thought it better to bring our engagement to a close at the last," and now having got to the door, he went out of it, leaving

the billiard-room to discuss at its ease this very astounding intelligence, which quite threw into the shade all the interest, that had been springing up in the Northweys, and their domestic arrangements.

"I've let the cat out of the bag, Fanny," said Major Bolton, coming upon her alone in Union Street, the Ryde Regent Street, a few minutes afterwards; "and now the question is, will you tell the Bulmers, or shall I?"

"Oh, you had better let me. It is very stupid of you though, Harry; they would never have guessed, and we were all going on so comfortably."

"Yes, very comfortably; but you forget my leave will soon be up."

"But then there is the extension, you are sure of that; you know you are."

"Yes, if I asked it; but I am not going to do that. The truth is, Fan, the sooner I am out of England the better. Now you know it."

"Oh, very well then; I will just go back to that shop I was last at, and order a few things, for I suppose there won't be time to go up to town about a trousseau. But your regiment is not abroad. What! you have exchanged! Oh, Harry, how sorry you must have been! But then there really is nothing but a fortnight to arrange everything in. I say, Harry, don't you think you had better settle all you have got upon me, and then your creditors won't be able to claim it," said she, with one of her most bewitching smiles.

"Unfortunately I can't settle my pay, and there is devilish little else," was all Major Bolton replied, but again he thought there surely never was such a brave girl as Fanny. How he had shrunk from confessing all to her, and now this was the way she took it.

"I will tell Uncle Henry directly I get home, and don't come in with me. It is only useful things I am going to buy. I

have got enough finery to last me a life-time already. So adieu till we meet again as humble penitents, with all the world talking at us. However, it is only to last a fortnight."

"Yes, and I shall be glad when the fort-night is over."

"Thank you; I suppose that is meant for a compliment to me. No! oh, you rude creature! I shall not stop talking to you any longer," and Fanny ran into the shop, and ordered what she required for her trousseau as coolly as if she had done it a hundred times before, which was not the case, though it might have been, considering her many engagements. She had not yet heard what regiment Major Bolton had changed into, nor to what part of the world they were to go, but she was only buying useful things, and those are much the same all the world over, so she ordered what she thought she absolutely required, and then went home very composedly to announce her

approaching marriage, and this was how she set about it.

"So I am late for luncheon, am I? It seems to me I am late for pretty near everything now, it is high time I did not appear at all. Don't you find me very troublesome, Cousin Mary?"

"Oh very—what will you have? some cold chicken, or—everything is cold now, of course."

"Yes, so give me something that was originally intended to be cold, if you please. Some chicken I think I prefer. However, it is just as well you find me troublesome, for then you will be glad to hear I am going off your hands at last."

"My dear Fanny, what do you mean?"

"You are not engaged to anyone again, I do hope," began Lord Bulmer.

"No, no, Uncle Henry, not engaged to anyone this time, but going to be married, really going to be married."

"I should be heartily glad to think so,

not but that we should be very sorry to lose you, Fanny. Don't fancy it is because I am in any way anxious to get rid of you, only for your own sake I should be so glad—"

"Thank you, thank you, Uncle Henry, but don't begin being glad before you know who it is to. It is not to any of your grand swells, or catches, only to my old love Harry Bolton, and it is really to be, and what is more it is to be all over in a fortnight, because his leave will be up, and dear me! this chicken is awfully nasty. I will just leave you to talk it over in peace, without the bore of considering my blushes," and in her liveliest style Fanny fled out of the room laughing gaily. She had announced her engagement, and now in her turn she thought it best to "hook it," as Major Bolton had done before her. Thus Florence was left to bear the first brunt of the Bulmers' indignation alone.

"She can't be serious," exclaimed Lord Bulmer.

"I never heard anything so preposterous," said Lady Bulmer. "Have you been her confidante, Florence? if so, pray explain the meaning of this announcement."

"I don't know any hidden meaning in it, Cousin Mary, but, as perhaps you know, Fanny and Major Bolton were engaged to each other years ago, and it seems it was only broken off through a misunderstanding. I did not know they were to be married so soon, but I am so glad it has all come right. They seem to love each other very much."

"Nonsense!" said Lady Bulmer.

"It is quite out of the question," repeated Lord Bulmer, getting up and walking about the room in his indignation, an action which Florence had never seen in him before. "Fanny must be joking."

"Indeed, Uncle Henry, she is not joking, I can assure you of that, and I do not see why you should be annoyed about it," said

Florence with spirit. "Major Bolton is a gentleman, though he is not rich, and he has cared for Fanny all his life."

"Oh now, my dear Florence, pray do not talk any such silly stuff. Of course I should not wish to see your sister marry anyone, however rich and well-connected, if she did not care for him sufficiently. But to talk of her marrying Major Bolton, because she cares for him, is simply too ridiculous, it really is, so pray do not say anything more about it. Of course I shall never give my consent to it, and it must be put a stop to at once."

"I do not think you will find that easy," said Florence meekly, her blue eyes now suffused with tears, for she had taken such pleasure in the thought of Fanny's happiness, that she could not bear to think of any unnecessary bitters being now thrown into her sister's cup.

"Fanny has some common sense though she is obstinate, and you will see, she will

think better of it presently. Major Bolton is a wild extravagant man, I can hardly believe he is not considerably involved at the present moment, it would be absurd to think of his marrying anyone, much more then to think of his marrying Fanny, who with all her good qualities, to which I never have been blind, is wild too in her way, and wants some one to steady her. If she marries Major Bolton they will both go to the dogs together, at a double quick pace, and I shall wash my hands of them both, and of you too, my dear Florence, if you will persist in supporting such a very preposterous match. However, it will never come to that, it must just be put a stop to at once, and now as we all seem to have done luncheon, may we not as well disperse, without heating ourselves needlessly by discussing this very visionary marriage."

So for the moment the subject was dropped, but only for the moment, to be

resumed again when Fanny next made her appearance. She was not long about doing this, for she had nothing of the coward in her nature, though she had rather shrunk from hearing the Bulmers' first remarks on being informed of her new engagement, but when she reappeared she seemed to have quite got over that, and bravely taking the bull by the horns began the subject herself.

Then there was a storm, such as had never been before in the Bulmer household. Lord Bulmer was fiercely dictatorial, and Fanny equally fiercely contradictory; Lady Bulmer who at first thought to set matters right by a little woman's wit and woman's wisdom, finding she was not listened to, lost her temper more completely than either of them, and finally banged out of the room in a way most unbecoming a lady, whilst Florence seemed again to have taken the bit between her teeth, and was, as Lord Bulmer declared, even more sense-

less than Fanny. This was as in a final state of exasperation he was looking for hat and cane, armed with which he was about to sally forth to bid Major Bolton think no more of Fanny Berkeley.

Major Bolton was yet more impracticable than the two sisters, and far more provoking, keeping as cool as a cucumber himself, whilst he regretted "the annoyance, the inevitable annoyance" to Lord Bulmer, but persisted in his original intention of marrying Fanny within the fortnight.

"Well, then you must marry Florence too," exclaimed the excited Lord Bulmer, "for I tell you I will have nothing more to do with either of them. She is of age in a few days, so that I shall not be legally responsible for her any longer, but of course I never meant that to have the slightest effect upon me; she has got into trouble here, how I can't quite understand, but I meant to treat her like my own

daughter, and see that all that was set right again. But if you marry Fanny I will have nothing more to do with Florence either, not unless she promises to cease from having any intercourse whatever with her sister, so you may as well marry Florence too, are you prepared for that ?"

"Not quite, being neither a Mormon, nor a Mahommedan, but with such a bribe Heaven only knows what may become of me—or possibly the other place."

At such levity Lord Bulmer waxed more wrathful than before, he said it was only because they had positively nowhere to go to, that he did not turn the two girls out of his house at once, but that if Fanny would persist in marrying Major Bolton, and Florence would not break with her, the day of the wedding should be the last day that his roof should ever shelter them, and from that day he would never see either of them again."

"I don't see what poor Florence has

done to be included in this banishment," said Major Bolton, gravely.

"She has aided and abetted. If she has not committed the crime herself, she has been cognisant of it, and besides, I should like to know, sir, on what fortune you are thinking of marrying my niece."

"I have no fortune, as you know perfectly well, Lord Bulmer, or you would not have received the tidings of my intentions, as you have done."

"No, sir; you have no fortune. I know that, and I know also that you have debts, sir. Debts, debts, I say!" vociferated Lord Bulmer, "and you mean to drag my niece, Fanny, down with you into the slough of poverty, and you will drag Florence also. Do you think she is the girl not to help her sister, and her sister's husband, and how long do you think her wretched pittance will last you? It will be gone before you ever know that you have received any benefit from it, and then where will she be?

Simply dependent upon the bounty of her relations. It is not that I should grudge her that bounty ; God knows I have meant to do the best for my poor sister's children, and that I would willingly spend half my fortune, if it was to do either of them any good, but Florence would be only a sieve, through which my money would percolate into your hands, sir—into your hands, I say, and into your hands, I repeat, I have no intention of any of my money going. So, unless Florence breaks with Fanny from the day of her marriage, she breaks with me from that very day, and you may consider you have both sisters on your hands."

"Thanks. But does it not strike you, Lord Bulmer, that if your acquaintance with your niece is to cease from the day of her marriage, your acquaintance with your niece's future husband might as well not be prolonged any further ? True, I am going to marry your niece, but I do not ask you

to portion her in any way ; and she is of age, so I do not quite see how you are justified in entering into my house—certainly, it is only a room at an hotel, but whilst I live in it, it may be considered as my house —and using such language to me, as that you have been indulging in for the last half hour or more. I marry your niece on Tuesday week, but she is her own mistress, and I do not owe you any thanks for anything, so excuse me, my lord, I wish you a very good morning," and opening the door, Major Bolton politely bowed out his astonished visitor.

Lord Bulmer went home and stormed again, but it was all to no purpose. Fanny was resolute, and Florence would not open her eyes to her sister's guilt, and promise never more to regard her as a sister, so the sentence of exile went forth against the two Berkeleys, and they were given to understand that they were only on sufferance till Tuesday week, and that after that they

might shift for themselves—Lord Bulmer would trouble himself no more about them.

He had a very formal interview with Florence on the day she came of age, in which he was careful to explain to her exactly how much money she had, and where it came from ; and after that he delivered her a little lecture for her future guidance in life, finishing up by asking her —it was the first time he had done so— what she intended to do with herself after that fatal Tuesday week. "Do you go with Major and Mrs. Bolton, to follow the fortunes of his regiment?" said he loftily.

"No," replied Florence, almost equally loftily, for she thought she was being treated badly, and her pride was up, "in the first place, I am going to Town with Mrs. Cholmondeley ; she wants me to live with her, but I do not think I shall do that. The Domvilles, with whom I came home from Switzerland, have always pressed me to go and pay them a long visit in Wales, and I

think I shall accept their invitation now. That will give me plenty of time to settle my future plans."

"Certainly," said Lord Bulmer, with dignity, and then he made her a low bow, and Florence knew that her audience was at an end, and that she was dismissed.

"Thank you, Uncle Henry, for all the trouble you have taken for me," she said, as she was leaving the room.

"In a case like this your thanks are almost insulting, Florence," said Lord Bulmer, and thus they parted.

Florence had never liked him, his compliments had always been distasteful to her, and she had never been able to respect him, but still it pained her that he should part from her in this way. She had lived for some time in his house now, and he had always appeared fond of her, and treated her rather as a favourite; now this formal interview seemed intended for their last, and a cold bow was apparently all the fare-

well he thought fitting to bestow upon her. She went up stairs with an aching heart, for all her dignified bearing, and there she found fresh matter for annoyance.

Fanny had been at a loss who was to give her away, now that her Uncle Henry would not take the office upon himself, as would have been natural, and in this difficulty she had bethought herself of Cousin Percy, and had written him a little note, requesting this favour of him.

"Don't look so vexed, Florrie, I thought you would not mind, as you did not care for him any longer, and he is not going to do it. Look, here is his note," said the kindhearted, but alas, always inconsiderate Fanny, seeing a strained, wearied look come over her little sister's deep blue eyes, a look such as they had learnt to wear too frequently of late.

Florence took up the note, and read it hurriedly through.

"DEAR FANNY,

"I am sorry not to be able to do as you ask me, but independent of vexing Lord Bulmer, which, believe me, I should not consider in the least in comparison with doing you a service, however small, I am unable to comply with your request. I find that without my knowledge Evelyn has publicly joined the R.C.'s, and this has annoyed me so much, that we are leaving the place to-morrow. She is very far from well, and the doctor recommends a warm climate, so we are going to Rome, which of course in her present mood is the place she most wishes to see, and I only hope all the mummery there may disgust her with her new ideas. She is not able to get out, so is writing her adieux to Lady Bulmer, and as I have a good deal on my hands, I must ask you to allow me to do the same by you, who are, I daresay, also too much occupied to see any visitors. Pray believe that I wish you every happiness in your marriage,

though all such forms of words always seem very meaningless in comparison with what one would wish to say.

"I hope you may soon find some one else to take upon himself the office, which I must regretfully decline, and begging you to say all, that I have not time to write, to your sister as well as to yourself.

"Believe me, in haste,

"Your affectionate cousin,

"PERCY GORDON.

"P.S. Evelyn would like much to see Florence, if she can spare time. I have to be out all the afternoon, so she will be alone."

Short though this note was, it had cost Percy Gordon a great deal of consideration, and several sheets of note-paper, for all that untruthful little "in haste" at the end, jotted in to account for those remaining deficiencies, which he could not for all his trying smoothe over to his own satisfaction.

And it now took up rather more of Florence's time than was quite necessary, for she read it over once or twice before she finally laid it down.

"I am very sorry about Evelyn," she said at last.

"Yes, it is a great pity, is it not? I suppose you will go to see her, you may as well. Give her my love, please, if you do. But what has Uncle Henry said to you, Florence?"

"Oh, he has told me about my money, how I can make ducks and drakes of it any day, and how I had better not, but I knew all that before, and he gave me a lot of good advice, which was very good, I dare say. He did not say much, but he asked what I was going to do with myself, which was kind of him, I suppose."

"Poor dear Florence! it is too bad that you should have to suffer for my misdeeds. It really is, and I am quite unhappy about it. Though there is not much use in saying

so." And she twined her arm caressingly round her sister.

"Nor in being so," said Florence sadly. "I never should have got on with the Bulmers, or wished to live with them. It would perhaps have been the right thing to do, if they would have had me, but now I am saved from that disagreeable, without any fault of my own, for I cannot give you up, Fanny. You are my sister, and it would not be right even if I wished to, which I I don't, and I cannot say that I think it wrong of you to marry Major Bolton. But I do hope he is a good man. Do you think he is good, Fanny? Sometimes I feel so anxious about it," and Florence looked up wistfully at her sister.

"Quite good enough for me. A very good man would never suit me."

"Oh, but Fanny, that is not the way, not seriously," pleaded Florence. Her tears were very near the surface now, and they began to show in the large deep blue

eyes. Fanny stooped and kissed them away.

"The world calls him a bad man, and the world has more reason, than it often has, on its side," said Fanny in a grave quiet manner, not much unlike Florence's own, and altogether without precedent in the gay Fanny's past life; "but I remember Harry, when he was quite young, before this same world had had anything to do with the making of his character. His was then the most generous, the most straightforward, the most loving, trustful disposition I ever met with, and I believe he has all the same qualities still, though warped by all—all the course of his after life," said Fanny bitterly. "He may not be a religious man now, I do not imagine that he is, but I would give more for Harry Bolton's religion even at his worst, than for that of half the clergymen in England; for if it were once brought home to him—as it never has been yet—he would be true

to it for ever, just as he has been true to his love, and that is what half of them neither have been, nor could be. I don't go in for being good as you know, Florence; you know I am fast and wicked, for fastness is wickedness and nothing else, and flirting is not right, and nothing will make it so, and I pray, little sister, especially now that you are to be left so alone in the world, that you may never have to do with another girl as bad as I am; but bad though I am, I tell you I would break with Harry Bolton this moment, if I did not believe he was all that I have said, though his natural character is so covered up with all the world's vices, that it requires the eye of love to see what it really is. I know it is covered up now. I know he swears and gambles, and —no, thank heaven, he does not drink, though I would marry him just the same if he did, for he is good, he is good through it all, and pray for me, Flo, pray for me, my own dearest little sister, that I may

ever make him half such a good wife as he deserves to have," and then worn out by her emotion, Fanny broke down, and the two sisters wept together, clasped in each other's arms.

They were soon to part now, and they had not been very affectionate sisters in byegone days, nor seen much of each other, and they were separated by a great gap of years, and so it surprised them both a little to find how very sad at heart they each felt at the idea of the parting, that was to be so soon; but then they had grown fonder of each other during these few months at Ryde, than in all the years of their past life, and Fanny's happiness was making her very soft at heart, and every now and then she felt very anxious, desperately anxious about the beautiful little sister, whom she was leaving behind so very much alone in the world. But she had thrown in her fortunes with Harry Bolton's, once and for ever, and there was no drawing back now,

and for Florence to go out with them to Mauritius, where Major Bolton's present regiment was quartered, and to join her fortunes to their struggling ones would be madness. It was not to be thought of for a moment, though equally of course Major Bolton had offered her the choice of doing so, but she had declined, very wisely too, as the three agreed, when they consulted over it together. So Florence was to be left behind alone in England, and Fanny's heart smote her bitterly, when she thought of it sometimes, but there was nothing to be done for it now, and all too little time to settle Fanny's own affairs.

END OF VOL. I.

BILLING, PRINTER, GUILDFORD.